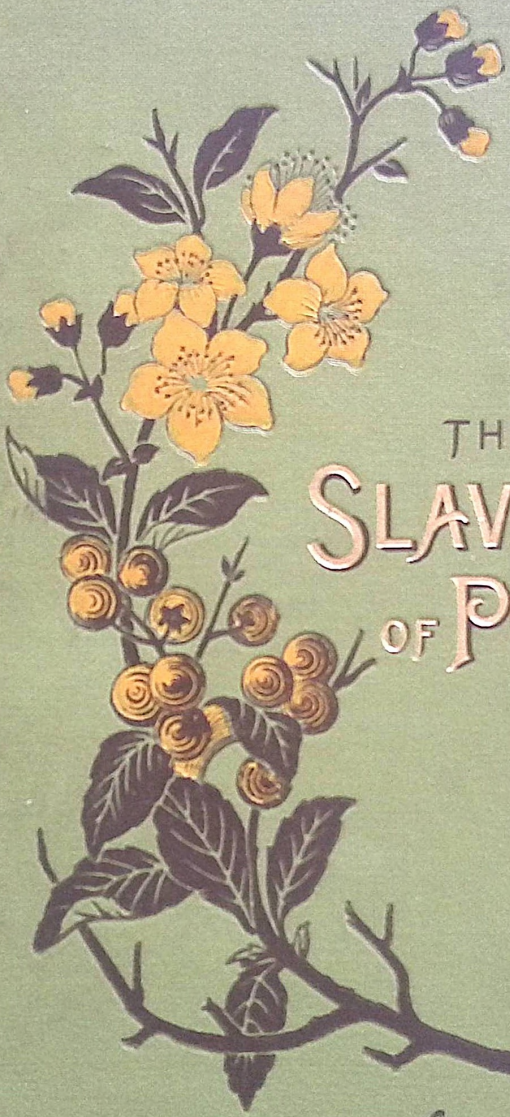

THE SLAVE GIRL OF POMPEII

Emily S. Holt.

"An earthquake?" whispered the two girls, who were even more terrified than their mother.—*Page* 20.

THE

SLAVE GIRL OF POMPEII

OR

BY A WAY THEY KNEW NOT.

A Tale of the First Century.

BY

EMILY SARAH HOLT,

AUTHOR OF "MISTRESS MARGERY," "THE WAY OF THE CROSS," ETC.

"My Christ He is the Heaven of heavens,—
My Christ what shall I call?
My Christ is first, my Christ is last,
My Christ is all in all."

—JOHN MASON.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY M. IRWIN.

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THE SLAVE GIRL OF POMPEII.

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CHAPTER I.

CALPHURNIUS THE SLAVE-DEALER.

"Tribes of the wandering foot and weary breast,
How shall ye flee away and be at rest?"—BYRON.

A YOUNG Roman lady sat at work in a small room, elegantly furnished. The walls were adorned with various devices, and in the middle of each of three sides of the room was an encaustic painting of superior execution. Pilasters of volcanic stone, decorated with leaves in stucco, projected slightly into the apartment. Just below the cornice, the wall, painted white, was adorned with pictures of Tritons and Satyrs, boys riding on dolphins, flying horses, garlands of flowers, groups of fruit, and girls playing the cittern. The table which stood in the middle of the room was of Parian marble, and its feet, in the form of lion's claws, were of silver. The seats were made of ebony, inlaid with ivory, and the feet of these also were of silver. There was no carpet or matting on the floor, and indeed it would have been a pity to hide the beautiful tesselated pavement; but in one corner lay a soft silky rug, on which amicably reposed a slender Italian greyhound and a white Maltese shock-dog. On a silver rod suspended from the roof was perched a green parrot, and on another at the opposite end of the room, sat a pair of beautiful snowy Sicilian doves, a nightingale, and one of those abnormal creatures termed a white blackbird. The fourth side of the

apartment was partly closed by a thick and heavy curtain, of a dark claret colour. Its solitary inhabitant, a girl of twenty years of age, occupied one of the ebony seats. Her figure was slight and graceful, her complexion clear and pale; her hair jet-black, and wound round her head in long plaits, forming something like a coronet on the summit; her eyes were large and very dark, with a peculiar look, which seemed half bewildered and half mournful, though round the lips played a very different expression, indicative of amiability of disposition and even playfulness of temper. The portion of her dress which was visible, consisted merely of a long white linen garment, called a stola, elaborately worked at the bottom, and fastened round the waist by a rich girdle; the arms and throat were bare, the feet were covered by richly ornamented slippers. Her employment was the embroidery of another garment similar to the one which she wore; and she occasionally glanced up from her work to speak one or two cheerful words to the birds perched on the silver rods, which on their parts sang and chirped to her with great vivacity, and no little noise. The nightingale and blackbird poured out floods of melody, while the doves cooed in low soft tones, and every now and then the parrot broke in with a discordant remark.

"Ah, my pretty doves!" said the girl in Latin—but very differently accentuated Latin from that spoken by Englishmen,—"I wish I knew what you mean by your sweet cooing! Are you thinking of the woods of Trinacria, where you were caught, and where you built your nests in the trees, among the green leaves of spring? Well, if I knew all that I wish I knew, I should be very learned; but I would gladly give all other knowledge for the supply of that one want which so greatly distresses me. If I only knew whether the gods will *really* hear us when we call to them! Is there any one of them who will?"

"Go to sleep!—go to sleep!" cried the parrot from above her head.

"Small chance there is of my doing that with you in the ala, Psyche!" said the girl, looking up laughingly to the handsome bird, which, turning its head on one side, gazed down upon her as if it thought it had said a very clever thing. "But I must

not sleep, my pretty Psyche, in any case; for my work will scarcely progress under those circumstances, and the pattern is too elaborate to trust to any hands but my own. Who is coming?" she added in a different tone.

The heavy claret-coloured curtain was pushed aside, and another girl rather older than the embroideress thrust in her head at the corner.

"Camilla! Camilla! make haste and come here! Our mother is buying a new slave to wait upon you and me."

Camilla sprang up, and hastily throwing her work on her seat, obeyed the summons. From the ala, withdrawing the curtain, she passed into the atrium, a large and splendid apartment, in the midst of which played a silvery fountain, and above it the roof was open to the air. Tesselated pavement formed the floor, and at intervals all round stood elegantly draped statues on pedestals. Here and there were placed rich couches and seats, and on one of the latter a lady of middle age was seated, evidently the mother of the two girls who had just entered. She was dressed, like her daughters, in a long white embroidered stola; but, loosely thrown over it, she wore a palla, or scarf shawl, of soft woollen material, and deep yellow in colour. Near her stood a tall, swarthy, stalwart man, and a young woman, very fragile and delicate in appearance, with regular features, very white and thin. She wore a rough woollen garment of dark colour, which hung ungirded from her neck to her feet; and the latter were bare. The lady turned her head as her daughters approached.

"Come hither, girls," she said, "and see whether you like this slave-girl. I have some thoughts of buying her for you, if Calphurnius do not ask too high a price. What say you, Marcia?"

"Oh! I should like it very much, Mother."

"And you, Camilla?"

Camilla and the slave-girl had been looking at each other while her mother was speaking. There was something in the countenance of the slave peculiarly attractive to the young Roman lady, and when her mother appealed to her, she bent down to her, and whispered, "Mother, I do so wish you would buy her!"

"Well," returned the lady, "my daughters seem to like the look of the slave, Calphurnius; what is her name, and whence does she come?"

"From Greece, Domina, and her name is Sophronia."

"And your price?"

"Two thousand drachmæ." *

"Two thousand drachmæ! Do you mean to ruin me, Calphurnius?"

"That would be hard to do, Domina!" answered the slave-dealer, with a fawning smile.

"There, take the girl away. Let Julia Felix or Cornelia Vipsania give you two thousand drachmæ—I shall not."

The slave-dealer bowed very low. He well knew that few ladies in Pompeii, beside the one before whom he stood, were at all likely to give such a price as he had asked; and he might as well moderate his demands for her as for any other.

"You are hard upon me, Domina!" he said with a shrug of his shoulders. "But, in consideration that I am dealing with so good a customer, and so universally esteemed a lady, I will make a small abatement, though I declare to you that it will give me very little profit. I will say eighteen hundred drachmæ."

"You must come down lower than that, Calphurnius, before you will deal with me," answered the lady,—whose name was Flavia Aurelia Cotta,—with a hard smile.

"Well, then, Domina, fifteen hundred; but I swear I shall gain nothing on the transaction."

"Six hundred—not a drachma more," returned Aurelia.

"Six hundred, Domina! It is positive ruin! you could not wish to entail such a loss upon a poor man! I gave seven hundred and fifty," replied the slave-dealer, having apparently forgotten his assertion the minute before, that he should make no profit upon fifteen hundred drachmæ.

"I do not believe a word of that, Calphurnius," answered Aurelia with perfect coolness. "I am an old customer of yours, as you know, and am thoroughly acquainted with the bare-faced lies which you generally think it necessary to tell; be-

* About £70.

sides, I know well that you always ask three times the price you mean to take. I don't believe that the girl cost you a denarius more than five hundred drachmæ, and I am offering you six."

Calphurnius grinned as if she had paid him a compliment. "Ah Domina, you always have your own way. Come now, fourteen hundred drachmæ."

"Six hundred," said Aurelia, gathering her palla round her.

"Twelve hundred!"

"Six hundred," repeated the lady, rising.

"A thousand!"

"Six hundred—not another denarius. Farewell, Calphurnius." And Aurelia turned as if to leave the place.

"Come, come, Domina, we shall not quarrel. But you are very hard upon me—*very* hard."

"Six hundred?" said Aurelia, looking back over her shoulder, and in an interrogative tone.

"Six hundred, Domina, as you will have it so," answered the slave-dealer submissively.

Aurelia turned back, and resumed her seat, while Calphurnius unloosed the cords which bound the slender hands of the purchased maiden.

"And I will say this, Domina," added he, "that I believe you will have a good slave for your bargain. Of her good looks you can judge for yourself, and she is extremely docile—indeed, I have not needed to give her a single whipping since I purchased her. Be careful, Sophronia, that you behave as well to your new mistresses."

"Here is the money," said Aurelia. "Farewell, Calphurnius. Take the slave with you, daughters, and amuse yourselves by instructing her in her duties."

Calphurnius, with low reverences, departed, and Marcia and Camilla summoned Sophronia to follow them to the ala, where they seated themselves. Camilla resumed her embroidery, while Marcia played absently with the greyhound, Sophronia standing before them.

"Sophronia is your name?" said the elder of the sisters. "(We really must put her into better clothes, Camilla.) Sophronia is your name?"

"Yes, Domina," responded the slave, speaking Latin with a decidedly foreign accent, but in a very sweet low voice.

"A Greek?"

"My father was a Greek."

"And you have lived in Greece?"

"No, Domina, I never saw Greece."

Both sisters uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Where have you lived, then?"

Sophronia blushed scarlet, and her eyes filled with tears. "I will tell the truth, Dominæ," she said in a slightly tremulous voice. "My mother was a Jewess, and I have always lived in Jerusalem."

Well might that young girl, standing before a Roman, blush and tremble to confess herself one of that despised, down-trodden race, the conquered inhabitants of Judæa. The utter destruction of Jerusalem had occurred nine years before our story opens; hundreds and thousands of Jews and Jewesses had been sold for slaves throughout the Roman Empire, until, as their great Lawgiver had predicted, "no man would buy them." Certainly Aurelia Cotta would never have given six hundred drachmæ, nor even a twentieth part of that sum, for a Jewish maiden; and Sophronia might well have feared that on her mistress making the discovery that her newly-purchased slave was only Grecian by the half-blood, she would immediately send her back to Calphurnius. The manner in which her confession was received, at least by one of the young ladies, scarcely tended to reassure her.

"A Jewess!" exclaimed Marcia, in mingled amazement, indignation, and abhorrence. "That scoundrel Calphurnius! He ought to be made to refund the money immediately! Six hundred drachmæ for a Jewess! I should as soon think of giving it for a fly."

Camilla checked the exclamations which her sister was pouring out, by saying, "You will frighten the poor girl, dear Marcia. It is not her fault if she is unfortunately a Jewess, and I am sure she has shown great courage and honesty in confessing it."

"Not her fault!" returned Marcia in the same tone as before. "Not that dog's fault—down, Porpax!—that he is a dog! Camilla, I wonder to what absurdity you will give utterance

next! I shall go and tell my mother immediately, and she will punish that wretch Calphurnius as he deserves, by sending the creature back to him."

"No, Marcia, you will not when I beg you not to do so."

"You do not mean to say that you will have such a creature as that to wait upon you? She shall not touch the hem of my palla, I promise you! But you always were a mean-spirited girl."

"You can please yourself, Marcia," said Camilla, a little roused by the compliment just paid her; "but I certainly intend that she shall wait upon me, unless my mother command me to resign her."

"Faugh!" said Marcia in disgust. "Well, pray please yourself, Domina Camilla; I wish you joy of your Jewess! I only hope you will give her plenty of pork for supper, and make her sacrifice to Diana at the first opportunity, to air a few of her Israelitish prejudices; and pray forgive me for quitting your presence so long as you keep company with swine!"

And so saying, Marcia gathered her dress carefully round her, to avoid touching Sophronia, and passed out into the atrium.

"Unhappy Sophronia!" said Camilla softly. "I am very sorry that my sister should have spoken so unkindly to you. Sit down here at my feet, and tell me where you have been living since—since you left Jerusalem."

"Since the city was destroyed, the Domina would say," said Sophronia in a low plaintive voice, after she had seated herself on the ground according to the desire of her young mistress. "Ah, Domina, I scarcely know where. All the world over, I think. I have been handed about, with dozens of my countrywomen, from slave-dealer to slave-dealer, and wherever we were exposed for sale as Jewesses, 'no man would buy us.'"

"And your parents? Were they with you?"

"My father was killed when the Romans entered the city, and my mother died of famine a short time before."

"How dreadful! And had you any brothers and sisters?"

"Four brothers, who all died before or during the siege, and a sister who was sold into slavery like myself."

"Do you know where?"

"No, Domina, no more than I know what has become of the birds of last year."

"Unhappy Sophronia!" said Camilla again.

The girl looked up as if about to speak, but dropped her eyes and remained silent when Aurelia at that moment drew aside the curtain.

"Well, Camilla, what do you think of your new attendant?"

"I like her extremely. Mother, will you grant me a favour?"

"Certainly, child, if it be reasonable."

"Please to promise me that Sophronia shall be mine, if Marcia take a dislike to her."

"Of course—I gave her to you. Marcia is always taking likes and dislikes. What is the matter now?"

"Sophronia has told us that she was not born in Greece, and that her mother was not a Grecian; and Marcia thinks that Calphurnius has cheated you, Mother."

Aurelia laughed. "I am sure he has, if he could; it is just like the old villain. However, it shows honesty in the girl. What was your mother, child, and where were you born?"

"O Mother!" broke in Camilla hastily; "please do not send her back! I like her so much."

Aurelia, who was apparently in the best possible temper, patted the cheek of her daughter, and then returned to receive the answer of Sophronia, who stood with downcast eyes before her.

"Domina, I was born in Jerusalem. My mother was a Jewess."

Aurelia's eyes flashed angrily; but she met the earnest pleading glance of Camilla, and the fire died out of them.

"Well, child," she said in a half-annoyed, half-gracious tone to the latter, "you can please yourself. The girl is fair and well-spoken, and seems honest, for her looks are Grecian, and she certainly could have no reason for telling the truth if she had thought fit to conceal it. I wished to please you by giving you a slave, and I should probably have to pay as much for any other; so, if this girl pleases you better than another, I do not object to your keeping her. I will find some other way of paying off that rascal Calphurnius."

"Oh thank you, dear Mother! thank you!" said Camilla, with beaming eyes. "I should not like any other half so well. But Marcia——"

"Oh, I will get another for Marcia."

"I am so much obliged to you, dear Mother!" repeated Camilla, while Sophronia timidly bent down and kissed Aurelia's hand.

"Well, be a good girl," said the latter to Sophronia; "you know I might have sent you back, which would probably have earned you a whipping from your master; and I expect you to show your gratitude for my leniency, by increased diligence in the Domicella's service. There, that will do; be honest and obedient, and the misfortune of your birth shall not be remembered against you."

CHAPTER II.

NEW IDEAS.

"Fisher of men, O Lamb, all-blessèd One!
From the foul pit of sin Thou winnest us
By Thy sweet love."

—*Translation of an ancient Greek Hymn.*

BEFORE Sophronia had been many days in her new position, Camilla perceived that the numerous slaves in her father's extensive household had taken as great a dislike to the new-comer as had been exhibited by Marcia. The latter, who rejoiced in a new subject for conversation, had at once informed those slaves who served at her toilet that Sophronia was more Jewish than Grecian, and they were not slow in spreading the interesting news. Sophronia, on her part, kept as much aloof from them as possible. She worked in the ante-chamber into which Camilla's bedroom opened, and at any part of the day except the slaves' meal times, when her young mistress might require her, she was certain of finding her in that quiet chamber. Sophronia herself never uttered a word concerning the ill-treatment which she experienced from the other servants, and it was only by her persistent seclusion, and by Camilla having once or twice caught some of the others in the act of branding Sophronia with such epithets as "Jewish dog," "Eastern barbarian," and "sucking-pig," that the mistress could form any idea of the petty persecution which the slave-girl experienced at the hands of her comrades. To the great distress of her sister, Marcia joined in the evil-speaking as much as any one.

Camilla had several times endeavoured to obtain from the slave-girl some further information regarding her parents and her early years, but Sophronia quietly, though respectfully, evaded her questions. Aurelia also tried to induce her to speak on these subjects, but in vain; and Camilla, concluding from this that the girl was unwilling to speak of her past life, forbore to question her any further. The reticence of Sophronia, nevertheless, did not lessen the curiosity of her young mistress to ascertain something concerning Jewish manners, and especially the Jewish religion. Camilla was entirely ignorant respecting the latter, having merely heard it spoken of as the "superstition" of these despised tributaries of the Roman Empire, and having understood that Jews were invincibly attached to their own faith, did not sacrifice to the Roman gods, and deemed it unlawful to eat pork. The number and nature of the gods whom the Jews worshipped—for the idea of a monotheistic religion never occurred to her—she specially desired to know; the quality of their sacrifices, the nature of their doctrines, and, above all, the success or failure of their prayers. On this latter subject Camilla's mind was frequently employed. Sophronia never uttered a word on such matters; and Camilla perceived that she must open the question herself. She occupied herself for some days in consideration of how this might best be done.

On one of these days, Camilla was busy at work in the ala, Sophronia attending on her, when one of the other servants ran in hurriedly to inquire if the latter might be permitted to come to the side-door of the house, which opened on a narrow street, to speak to a stranger who had rung the bell, and whose language none of the rest could comprehend. They fancied that he must be a Greek; might Sophronia speak to him and see? Camilla assented, and as only a curtain separated the room in which she sat from the passage which led to the side door, she drew aside the curtain, and glanced at the stranger. He was a young man in worn and travel-stained costume and of a foreign appearance. When Sophronia reached the door, Camilla noticed that she greeted the stranger with "Χαῖρε!"—a word the meaning of which the Roman lady well knew, from the circumstance of its being occasionally carved over the doors of the Roman houses.

The stranger returned the salutation, and for a few minutes the two conversed in a strange language which Camilla supposed to be Greek. Then Sophronia, returning to her mistress, informed her that the stranger was a poor Greek, who had been shipwrecked, and, having lost all his property, was endeavouring to beg his way back to his own country. Camilla desired Sophronia to give him a piece of money; the stranger took it, and apparently thanked her; but just before he turned to depart, he looked earnestly in the slave-girl's face, and murmured the word "Ἰχθύς!" The face of Sophronia lighted up as with a sunbeam, and she joyfully re-echoed the word twice. The Greek clasped her hand warmly, and with a parting salutation in his own tongue, went on his way.

Over this incident Camilla pondered long. What could be the meaning of that magic word? Shortly after this, a lady called upon Aurelia one morning whom Camilla knew to be a Greek scholar, and she took advantage of her visit to ask her the signification of the word ἰχθύς. "A fish, Camilla," was the simple answer; and Camilla was more puzzled than ever. "A fish!" what was there in the mere word "fish" to call up such a joyous expression on the countenances of the two Greeks? That afternoon, as Camilla was embroidering in the antechamber with Sophronia, she suddenly asked her,

"What did you mean, Sophronia, by saying 'Ἰχθύς' to that Greek? It merely means a fish, does it not?"

Sophronia's face and neck, usually so pale, flushed scarlet. "Yes, Domina, it means a fish," she answered in a slightly tremulous tone.

"But *you* meant something more than that, Sophronia?"

Sophronia hurriedly rose, and turned to pick up Camilla's scissors, which had dropped. "It is—it is only a—a word we use—among ourselves," she said with much embarrassment.

Camilla's curiosity was more tantalised than before. "Among yourselves?" she repeated.

Sophronia came and knelt down at her feet. "Domina—"

"Go on, Sophronia."

"Will the Domina graciously question me no further concerning that word?"

Camilla hesitated. "I do not wish to distress you," she said kindly; "but I am very curious to know its meaning."

Sophronia covered her face with her hands, and remained silent for a minute. When she looked up she was very pale, and an unusually anxious expression filled her eyes.

"Will the Domina not betray me?"

"Betray you, Sophronia? Certainly not!"

"The Domina will speak no word of what I say?"

"Shall I swear it by Diana?" asked Camilla, amused at what she supposed to be the unnecessary punctiliousness of the slave-girl with respect to some worthless secret.

"By no means, sweet Domina!" replied Sophronia, with a shocked and frightened air. "A word is sufficient."

"Be it so—I will not reveal your secret. Speak!"

But just as Sophronia seemed about to speak, Marcia entered the room. The slave rose hurriedly, and relapsed into her customary reticence.

Marcia seated herself upon a chair, and appeared inclined to remain for some time. Her conversation was not very entertaining, for she merely asked how Camilla found her new style of embroidery to wear, remarked that it was extremely hot, and wished that her own palla had been a darker orange. Camilla responded satisfactorily to her questions and observations, though she heartily wished her out of the room; but Marcia sat on, playing with her bracelets, and occasionally making very vapid remarks. Sophronia had taken up her work, and her lips appeared sealed. About half an hour had passed in this manner, when Aurelia's step was heard coming up the stairs. Camilla devoutly hoped that she would take Marcia away with her.

"Both here?" said Aurelia, reclining on the couch. "Sophronia, go down stairs, and ask Libia for my tablets and stylus; I have left them somewhere. Tell her to look for them in the ecus."

Sophronia quitted the room to obey the behest of her mistress; and Aurelia, yawning, added, "The Dominus talks of giving a banquet, daughters."

"When, Mother?" said Marcia, brightening up.

"To-morrow. You will have to sup by yourselves in the ala."

"How provoking it is that we cannot be there!" said Marcia, pouting.

"Very much better for young girls like you," replied Aurelia.

"But we may look through the curtain and see the guests arrive?" resumed Marcia.

"*You* may," said Camilla parenthetically.

"Yes, if you don't show yourselves," said Aurelia; "though I do not see much amusement in looking at a number of men wrapped up in palliæ."

"Who is to be there?"

"Oh dear, everybody—at least, nearly everybody of the least consequence in Pompeii: and a friend of the Dominus from Rome, Lucius Cornelius Strophius—a very clever man, they say, and an author."

"O Mother, I wish we might be there!" again sighed Marcia.

"You may think yourselves lucky that you are not. I expect I shall have a weary evening of it. When gentlemen drink a great deal of Falernian wine, they are not fit company for girls."

"Who is to wait on us, Mother? May we have the dishes as they come out from the triclinium?"

"We shall sup in the ecus. Yes, you may have the dishes (not thrushes, of course); but don't make yourselves ill. Lucipor shall hand them in as they come from the ecus, and Flora and Sophronia had better attend on you."

"Dear me, Mother!" said Marcia, not in a very good-tempered tone, "why may not girls eat thrushes, I should like to know? I want to taste them above all things."

"You know it is never allowed you," answered Aurelia. "Hark! what is that?" she exclaimed the next instant, springing to her feet with a white and terrified face.

A low rumbling sound, like distant thunder, which seemed to come from underground; doors slamming, objects falling, everything in the room violently shaken:—this was what caused Aurelia's exclamation.

"An earthquake?" whispered the two girls, who were even more terrified than their mother.

"The gods protect us!" said Aurelia. "Is it over?"

It was over. They heard the voices of the slaves downstairs,

screaming in terror; but in a few minutes all was calm again, and Aurelia re-seated herself.

"The gods grant it may not come again!" said she. "Ah girls, I remember a far more terrible earthquake than this,—fifteen,—no! sixteen years ago, when you were little children. I can tell you we thought the world was returning to chaos. Numbers of houses fell in the city, and many persons were killed. Some of the statues in the atrium were completely split asunder, and a great marble table which stood in the peristyle was tossed from one side to the other as if it had been a chip of wood. I never was so frightened in all my life. Don't you remember the pavement in the atrium of our neighbour, Domina Cornelia Vipsania? Well, the twistings of the pattern were occasioned by that earthquake. It positively made holes in the floor. Why, Sophronia, where were you just now? Have you not been terribly frightened?"

Sophronia entered the room with her mistress's tablets in her hand, as Aurelia concluded her speech.

"I was startled, Domina, for I was not expecting an earthquake."

"Was it you whom we heard scream?"

"No, Domina, I did not scream."

"Who did, then?"

"Libia and Cœnis both screamed, I think—they were very much terrified."

"And so were you, of course!" said Marcia contemptuously.

The slave made no answer, but her colour brightened a little.

"Well, girls," said Aurelia, rising, "I must leave you now. I wonder where Cœnis is.—Cœnis!" And Aurelia descended the stairs, clapping her hands for the slave.

"Mother!" said Marcia in a raised voice, "may I not come with you?"

"Please yourself!" said Aurelia in reply. And Marcia hastily followed her.

Camilla was very anxious to renew the conversation with Sophronia which had been interrupted by the arrival of Marcia. But Sophronia herself appeared very much averse to its re-

sumption. She went into the bedroom, ran down-stairs again as if to fetch something, and wandered nervously about, as if in dread of her young mistress's voice. At length Camilla arrested her by desiring her to unpick a piece of embroidery in which she found she had made some false stitches. The slave took the embroidery and seated herself, while Camilla went on with her own work. The latter opened the conversation by asking a question not very remote from the previous subject—perhaps less so than she herself was aware.

"Sophronia——"

The girl coloured, but did not look up.

"Sophronia, do your gods hear people when they pray to them?"

The girl's colour came and went hastily; her breast heaved almost painfully, and nearly two minutes elapsed before she could summon courage to reply, "Domina, the Lord, the God of Israel, is one Lord."

"What! have you only one God?" inquired Camilla with equal interest and surprise. The Roman girl was accustomed to the idea of a Pantheon, and at first her mind could scarcely grasp that of monotheism.

"One," answered Sophronia shortly.

"How very strange!" said Camilla slowly and thoughtfully. "Why then, of course it is impossible that He should hear prayer. He could not possibly have time and leisure to do so."

It was now Sophronia's turn to look astonished. "Domina!" she said.

"Well, what is it, Sophronia?"

"Ah, Domina, bear with me! What idea have you of God? Think you that He is as man, that you speak of time—He, the Eternal? *Your* gods are silver and gold, the work of men's hands, which can neither see, nor hear, nor speak. But as for our God, He is in Heaven, and the idols He shall utterly abolish; in that day when men shall go into the caves, and into the clefts of the rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty, when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth."

She paused, breathless with her own earnestness. Camilla sat looking at her in surprise. So many new ideas had never

been crowded into her head before. They were so many, that for the present she let all drop but the last, and said,

"And when will that day be, Sophronia?"

"Domina, of that day the angels in Heaven know not. But soon,—soon, very soon." The girl lifted up her head to the skies, and her eyes glowed with enthusiasm. "Soon, soon, O Messiah! wilt Thou come to the rescue of Israel. Is not this the time of Jacob's trouble? Is it not Thine to save him out of it? Oh tarry no longer on Thine azure throne! Rend the heavens and come down, mighty to save, strong to deliver, the Holy One of Israel, the Long-Expected, the Glorious!"

"Messiah!" repeated Camilla. "Who is that, Sophronia?"

"The Son of the Blessed," answered the Jewish maiden, forgetting for the moment that the words in question would present a very different meaning to a Roman ear from that which they conveyed to her own. The response of Camilla reminded her of it.

"'The Son of the Blessed!' Of your God, you mean? I am disappointed, then," said Camilla in an annoyed tone. "I hoped that your God might have been better than ours. But if He have sons who are mortals, it would seem that He is not."

"The Domina understands not," answered Sophronia, in her low clear voice. "'The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not.' Your gods, if they were gods who are none, are men of like passions with yourselves; they fight, they steal, they lie, they sin sins whereof the very names should not be named. But our God is the Just One and the Holy, in whose eyes the heavens are unclean, and in whose sight the thought of iniquity is an abhorrence. When I speak of the Messiah as the Son of the Blessed, the Domina supposes me to mean that He is a mere mortal, subject unto sin, like all men else. Be it far from me! He is God, one with the Father, equal to the Father, eternal as the Father."

"I can scarcely understand you, Sophronia. Your very words are strange words to my ear. What do you mean by speaking of Messiah, if that be His name, as equal to and co-eternal with His Father? Besides, you tell me you have only one God; and now you speak of two. I cannot comprehend it!"

"Who can comprehend God but God?" suggestively replied Sophronia.

Camilla sat in silence for a few minutes. A holy. eternal, incomprehensible God, was a Being the very idea of whom was completely new to her.

"Sophronia!" she said at length, "this is a grander God than any of ours! I never yet heard of such a God as this. Still, make it plain to me, if you can, how the Son can be equal to and eternal as the Father, and yet the two form (as you say) but one God?"

"Will the Domina like to hear a long story, and I will speak? Shall I tell how I myself came to know this in my soul?"

"There is nothing which would so much interest me, Sophronia."

Sophronia cut off her thread, folded up her work, and sat down on a low stool at Camilla's feet.

"A moment," said the latter, "before you begin. What was the meaning of that 'Ιχθύς'? Has that anything to do with your religion?"

"It is a word," answered Sophronia, quite calmly now, "which we use among ourselves, and by which we recognise the brethren, the letters whereof indicate the name of Messiah."

"How so?"

The slave bowed her head reverently as she answered,

"Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour."

CHAPTER III.

SOPHRONIA TELLS HER STORY.

"His bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible."—2 *Cor.* x. 10.

IF Sophronia had hoped that her skilful introduction would propitiate her young mistress, and cause her to pass over the point which was likely to startle her, she found herself mistaken. No sooner had she uttered the name of the Saviour, than Camilla recoiled from her with a shocked and contemptuous expression of countenance.

"Christ!" she said, instantly fixing upon the obnoxious name. "Are you then one of that superstitious sect called Christians? I have heard of them—what foolish and wicked people they are, and that they actually eat little children at their 'love-feasts,' as they call them, and drink blood! Sophronia, I am amazed! I really had hoped better things of you."

Sophronia sat still, her colour merely rising as Camilla spoke.

"Will the Domina be pleased," she quietly answered, "to hear calmly the words of her slave, and to strike after? What the Domina has been told of us is foul slander, as by her leave I will show."

"Well!" said Camilla, slightly appeased by Sophronia's words and manner, "I only know that my father told me what I have repeated to you; and he said that he had overheard one Christian in the amphitheatre at Rome speak to another concerning 'the last time when they ate together the flesh and blood.'"

"The Dominus doubtless took literally words which we use as a figure."

"Perhaps that might be," admitted Camilla rather reluctantly. "Well, go on, Sophronia,—let me hear your story."

The girl clasped her arms round her knees, fixed her eyes on a garland painted on the wall, and spoke as follows—at first slowly, her tone becoming quicker and more animated as she proceeded.

"I have been told, Domina, that I look younger than I am. Of that you will judge for yourself; I have lived twenty-seven years."

"Why, you are six years older than I am!" exclaimed Camilla. "I thought you were only about the same age as myself."

"Thirty-two years ago," resumed Sophronia, taking no notice of Camilla's exclamation, "my parents were married at Jerusalem. My father was a Greek, a proselyte to the faith of Israel, who had come up to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover; my mother was a Jewess dwelling in the Holy City. At the time of their marriage they were both ignorant of the faith, for since the departure of the Lord it was then barely fourteen years. My mother had heard in her childhood of Him, as a great Prophet whom many reverenced, and who had healed many sick, and dispossessed the vexed with devils; but she had never seen Him, and none of His wonderful works had been performed for any of her kinsfolk or acquaintance. The disciples of the Lord, whom He left behind, charging them to preach the words of this life which He had come to make known to men, were going up and down the Land of Israel, but they had never come near our dwelling. My father and mother had two sons before I was born; but they died infants, and I never knew them. I was their third child, and my sister Irene the fourth. I remember—it must be nearly fourteen years ago—that my father took a journey to Greece on account of some family property—for he was a man of some little wealth—leaving my mother and her children in Jerusalem. It was late in the spring when he returned, though we had expected him in the beginning of winter. He told us that he had not spent all that time in his own country, for he had found

Ladle in hand, and face red from the fire, entered the master-cook.—*Page* 38.

it necessary to go on to Rome. And at Rome he fell in with something which changed the whole tenor and purpose of his life. A man whom he knew, a Jew, who dwelt in Jerusalem, found himself (by the Lord's provision) in Rome at the same time as my father. Meeting one day in the capital, the son of Ananus—for thus he was called—asked my father among other converse if he had heard of the prisoner of Cæsar who was preaching at that time. He conjured my father to go and hear the man; and he, having to await the conclusion of his business, was readily persuaded to while away some of his unoccupied time in visiting the prisoner, who was not confined in the Imperial dungeon, but by the clemency of the authorities was suffered to dwell in a hired house with his keeper.

My father found the prisoner's chamber filled with Jews and Romans who were anxious to see the man, and to hear the strange things which he said. He had even some difficulty in making his entrance; but Simeon, the son of Ananus, who was acquainted with several persons in the room, succeeded in inducing them to make way for him.

"The name of the prisoner was Paulus. He was a Jew by parentage, yet a Roman citizen by birth, for which cause he had appealed to Cæsar on being accused by some turbulent men that dwelt in Jerusalem of I know not rightly what fault. The man was small of stature, scarcely reaching the common height of a woman. His head was partly bald, his nose high, his complexion fair, his beard long and narrow; but his eyes, which were extremely clear and brilliant, had in them a sweet serenity which touched the heart of my father. This Paulus, being entreated by such as were present, began to speak. At first my father was sorely disappointed in the man: his voice was slender and weak, his words common, and he hesitated much in his speech; but as he proceeded, and his heart became warmed with the thoughts of those blessed things whereof he spake, his speech changed, becoming quick and fluent, and was indeed pleasant to the ear."

Sophronia paused a moment, and rested her head upon her hand, as if she were weary.

"Go on, Sophronia," said Camilla. "I am extremely interested. What did Paulus say?"

"How much ought I to repeat?" answered Sophronia thoughtfully. "It is not common among us Christians to speak to those who are not such of the higher mysteries of our faith. And yet how else can I speak of the Lord to those who are in ignorance of Him? For is not He Himself the highest and the deepest mystery of all?"

"I desire that you would explain yourself a little more, Sophronia, for already you have said many things which puzzle me."

"I will try, yet the task is not an easy one. Let the Domina speak, if it be her pleasure."

"Well—first, by 'the Lord,' I suppose you mean Christ?"

"Certainly. There is none other."

"What, then, do you intend when you say 'His departure'? I thought that our authorities had put Him to death as an impostor, and a rebel against Cæsar."

"So did the Father, in infinite wisdom and love, permit Him to suffer; that He might by His death make propitiation for the sins of His own."

"Yours is a strange religion, Sophronia! I never heard of one to equal it. Your conceptions of God, as God, seem to me the grandest ideas that were ever presented to me. And yet, that you should suppose this God—so grand, so powerful, so glorious as you picture Him—to be capable of death, the same death that ordinary men suffer—nay, that He should permit Himself to be treated as a malefactor—it is preposterous beyond everything! I cannot understand it."

"Let it please the Domina to remember that I have already told her that God cannot be understood by man. She is weighing the truths of the faith in the balances of reason, and the balance is too weak to bear the weight. Moreover, she spoke a moment ago of my conceptions of God. Nay, for it is the Law of the Holy One, and the teaching of Messiah, which have revealed Him unto us—not any conception which we, poor, weak, erring mortals that we are, could have formed of Him. But I am wandering from my story. Shall I go on?"

"By all means," answered Camilla; and the girl proceeded.

"The words of Paulus were strange words to my father, as my words were of late to the Domina." Sophronia very rarely

smiled,—as did she now; but whenever a smile did break into the usual gravity of her countenance, it lighted it up like a sunbeam. "These words," she proceeded, "were not of such things as my father had heard aforetime. He had, indeed, much the advantage of the Domina, for he was already a worshipper of the Blessed One according to the Law. He knew, therefore —so far as an unholy man can know it—the eternity, the unchangeableness, the justice, the holiness, the purity, of God. But of the love and mercy of God, as it was unfolded to him by the words of Paulus, he knew indeed little. It is true, the ceremonies and sacrifices commanded by the Law did all point to Messiah and His greater sacrifice of Himself; but the faith of the nation was under a cloud, and there were few indeed who thought on these things. Most men contented themselves by performing the outward ceremony, without giving any heed to the inward signification; and our priests, with very few exceptions, were then evil and covetous men, who performed the sacrifices for the temporal benefits which they brought to themselves—for the priest always had a part of the sacrifice by command of the Law —and never troubled themselves to instruct the worshippers concerning the true inward and spiritual meaning thereof.

"Up to that period, therefore, my father, like others of our faith, had trusted to the actual outward sacrifices which he performed to take away his sins.—Let the Domina speak."

Camilla had made a motion as if to do so; and on Sophronia's silence, she said, with a puzzled look,—

"Sins! Was your father, then, a very wicked man?"

"He was, by the grace of the Lord, so far as man can be, just and righteous as regarded his social duties and his fellow men."

"Then what can you mean by speaking of him as you would of a malefactor?"

"May it please the Domina to say what she understands sins to be?"

"Oh, all sorts of evil deeds—murder, theft, rapine, cruelty, and injustice."

"These are indeed sins, and heavy ones: but in the sight of God the Holy One, all men, in all thoughts, and words, and actions whatsoever they be, are always sinning sins."

"Sophronia! Sophronia! You surely would not ask me to believe that?" cried Camilla incredulously, and almost laughing. "You are not sinning at this moment, nor am I!"

"So it seems to the Domina, because she looks on herself with the eyes of a sinful mortal, not with the pure eyes of the Holy One. Can we so much as imagine what He sees in us?"

Camilla gave a little shrug of her shoulders, and said,—"Well!—go on."

After a moment's pause Sophronia proceeded

"Before I go on to relate what Paulus spoke, perhaps I had better say a few words concerning the man himself. He was not one of the disciples who had followed the Lord during the time of His humiliation, for during some years he had been a violent persecutor of all who were of the truth: but during a journey which he took to Damascus, a town many stadia to the north of Jerusalem, the Lord intercepted him by a voice from Heaven, forbidding him to turn his hand against the brethren. On arriving in Damascus, the man joined himself to us, and became ere long one of the very chiefest apostles of the Lord, being assured by the blessing of the Lord upon his works that he was chosen and faithful.

"And now the Domina must know, that the coming of Messiah to earth was no strange thing to Israel. All our prophets, from the Lawgiver downward, have testified of Him. But the House of Israel took ill heed to it, and misunderstood the words of the prophets; mixing together the words which told of His past coming, to atone for the sin of His people and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and that yet future manifestation of Messiah, when He shall come to reign as King of Israel, and to shake terribly the earth. Therefore they expected Him not as He came. They looked for a Prince great and mighty, who should deliver Jacob from them that oppressed him, for a conqueror who should tread down the enemy, and should win to Himself the throne of David, to reign thereon for evermore. Thus will Messiah come hereafter. But now, He came—and they looked not for Him—a poor man and a lowly, to suffer and make atonement for the sins of the world. He came, the King, and they knew Him not. He laid aside His robes of state, and

came down to the earth which He created. a weak, helpless, little child; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and they hid their faces from Him. They despised Him in His low estate,—Him, who when He shall return will come with the clouds of heaven, a Judge, a Conqueror, and a King.

"This it was whereof Paulus spake to them who were gathered around him. He showed them that by numberless sins, ever since they were born, had they insulted the Majesty of the Holiest: and that the blood of bulls and the fat of rams, offered in sacrifice day by day on the altar at Jerusalem, could never of themselves atone for sin. These, therefore, must point to some better sacrifice, even that of the Messiah Himself, who, by His own sacrifice of Himself upon the cross, once offered, had made expiation for all the sins of His people, and had brought in for them an everlasting righteousness. While yet here in His low estate, He humbled Himself that He might exalt them; He became poor, that He might enrich them; He loved us who lay in the pit of corruption, as He sat upon His glorious throne, and came down to earth to die for us miserable sinners, that our penalty being paid by His blood, and we accounted righteous before God on account of His righteousness, we might mount up even into Heaven before the throne of God the Holy One, and be found blameless in the presence of His glory. Our Lord's humiliation is over now. No more shall He know poverty and pain and hunger, insolence and scorn, the anguish and the shame of the cross. Now on the right hand of the throne of God He sitteth—a King unto all the ages, a Priest for ever—and He shall ere long return in the clouds, and all His angels with Him, to judge all the living and the dead, and to justify them who have ventured their souls upon the word of His love. For is it not written, 'The eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards Him?'

"I know not if I have done well to speak thus openly. It is not the custom, as I said. From very few Christians would the Domina have obtained so full an answer. But at least I have done her bidding. And if in any wise I have erred, may the Lord be pleased to forgive me!"

Long before Sophronia's narrative was ended, Camilla had laid down her embroidery, and was listening with absorbed attention. As soon as the slave ceased speaking, her young mistress hastily rejoined,—"Then, Sophronia, your God does hear prayer?"

"Are they not the words of the very Christ,—'Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He shall give it you?'"

"But I am not one of the 'you,'" said Camilla pensively.

"What hinders that the Domina should become so?"

"O but I could never think of becoming a Christian!" hurriedly responded the Roman maiden. "I could not endure to be pointed out and scoffed at as one of that despised sect. No, no, Sophronia! I may believe and muse on what you tell me, but it must be in the silence of my chamber. Beside, it would break the hearts of my parents were I to profess Christianity."

A very, very sad expression overshadowed the pale wan face of Sophronia. "Ah, Domina! then are fulfilled the words of the Lord, 'He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me!' and 'he that taketh not up his cross, and followeth Me, cannot be My disciple.'"

Camilla shook her head, but did not speak.

"The Domina knoweth not yet the love of the Lord Christ!" added Sophronia as mournfully as before. "She knoweth not what it is to love Him above riches, above ease, above safety, yea, even above life itself."

"How is it possible to love an unknown person?" replied Camilla, gravely.

"Unloved, *because* unknown," answered Sophronia. "His love to us must ever precede and be the cause of ours to Him."

"He knows nothing about me," answered Camilla.

"Let the Domina pardon her slave! Did He not know her, did He not care for her, before the world was? Hath not His hand made all things? Is He not even now, in the unutterable fulness of His almighty love, waiting to hear her voice call upon His name? Did He create her, did He die for her, that when she should turn and spread forth her hands to Him, He should make answer and say unto her, 'I know thee not'?"

"Sophronia, do *you* love this Christ?"

A soft pink colour rose to cheek and brow, and the girl's eyes filled and ran over.

"Would I not die for him at any instant? Shall it be thought a hard thing that I, a despised slave, should give my life for Him who, being the Prince of the whole world, yet gave His life for me?"

"I am afraid you are an enthusiast, Sophronia!" said Camilla, half laughing—yet she was touched by the enthusiasm.

"So the world calls us," replied Sophronia quietly. "Enthusiasts, superstitious, fools, and many harsher names. The world loved not the Master, and how should it love them of the household? We can bear it,—we can wait patiently and in prayer, until the Lord comes in the glory of His majesty, and we shall see who will be the fools then."

"If you really can believe that He will so come, it is no wonder you should think so," remarked Camilla. "But how can you have any certainty of it?"

"He hath promised," was the calm answer.

"But how do you know that He did not deceive you?"

"Will the father deceive his children, or the master his servants, when he saith, 'Look for my coming home to-night?'"

"But might He not be deceived Himself?"

"Who shall deceive God?"

"How do you know that Christ is God?"

"Did not all the prophets even from Abraham our father prophesy of the Coming One? Did they not foretell that He should suffer and be rejected, and should afterward come again with great glory to the judgment?"

"But you cannot prove, if this be so, that this Man called Christ was the One of whom they spake."

"Domina, can you prove that the man called the Dominus Cneius Paratus Agricola was your father?"

"Of course!" said Camilla, opening her eyes. "I can find many who would testify to it."

"But they may have deceived you."

"Would my parents themselves deceive me on such a question?"

"They may have done so."

"But he loves me with such a love as comes only from a father, and not a stranger."

Sophronia smiled a triumphant smile.

"Ah! the Domina has found the solution! And shall Christ love less or more unworthily than he? Because He hath loved us, because we know that He hath saved us, thereby we know Him to be the Saviour, the Messiah."

"But," resumed Camilla, as if determined to have the last word, "*how* do you know that you are saved by Him?"

"The Domina now approaches the mysteries of the faith, which cannot be revealed to them that are without. Yet not to leave so important a question without an answer, let the Domina suffer me to say,—How does she know that she is beloved of her father?"

"Why, because of his constant kindness and care of me, and because—because I feel in my heart that it is so."

"The Domina's question has received its answer."

"Oh dear!" cried Aurelia, lifting the curtain. "Camilla, I vow that I have called you at least thirty times, and cannot get a reply. What can you be doing which appears to be of such intense interest that it deafens you to everything else? I want Sophronia this minute. Here is Actius swearing by Mercury and all the gods that if he does not get three more pairs of hands at least, he can never have the banquet ready to-morrow night. Go, Sophronia, and put yourself under his orders; he will tell you what to do. This heat is insufferable! I wish we were in Ultima Thule!"

Camilla, not in the best of humours at the sudden and uninteresting interruption of what was to her a most interesting conversation, signed to Sophronia to obey. The slave, enchanted, as by a fairy's wand, into the silent, passive being which she always seemed in public, quickly folded her work and descended to the kitchen.

CHAPTER IV.

DOMESTIC LIFE IN POMPEII.

"It is not reason makes faith hard, but life."
—JEAN INGELOW.

ROMAN ladies never condescended to soil their fair fingers with cookery, which they regarded as work only fit for slaves. However many pairs of hands had been required, therefore, by Actius, he might have sighed in vain for those of Aurelia or her daughters.

The kitchen, when Sophronia entered it, was far from being either silent or empty. It consisted of two rooms, the inner one opening out of the atrium, the outer communicating with the street, which in this instance was the Via Sacra. In the outer apartment a number of slaves were busied in mixing ingredients, cleaning vessels, and conducting the minor or rougher operations of cookery, under the superintendence of four important persons in the inner kitchen. These were Actius the master-cook, the carver, the structor or arranger of dishes, and an elderly female slave, the head assistant in this department, who stood rolling out pastry, and expressing great satisfaction that "that lazy, worthless slattern" Sophronia was come at last.

The master-cook, garbed in white, with a long ladle in his hand, promenaded the kitchen, issuing very peremptory orders to all in his employ, and rather disposed to forget that orders took time to execute. Under his instructions, Sophronia proceeded to mix the materials for coptæ and placentæ,—namely, cheesecakes and almond cakes—to assist with the peacock, and to help in various

ways in the preparation of such dishes as could be wholly or partially got ready on the day before the banquet.

It was not often that Paratus joined his family at supper, as he did on this occasion. A Roman gentleman lived out of doors, and was often an accomplished diner-out. The ladies were usually keepers at home, though they were much less strictly secluded than was the custom among the Greeks. On coming into the atrium, the master of the house brought with him an amount of scent which perfumed the whole area, for he had just left the thermæ. Here a slave was in waiting, with a loose white robe, which Paratus put on, having thrown off his pallium. The ladies were already in the triclinium when he appeared. He kissed his daughters, whom he had not seen since the previous evening; and then reclined himself on one of the couches, leaning on his left side, his arm being supported by cushions. Aurelia, in a robe of the same loose sort, with ivy in her hair, reposed on the opposite couch; while Marcia took her seat at the feet of her mother, and Camilla at those of her father. The attendants were three slave boys, dressed in loose tunics. The supper this evening was a very meagre one, since every one was busy preparing for to-morrow; and the meal consisted merely of olives, eggs, a couple of pheasants, a turbot, a water-rat, and some open tartlets. Paratus ate his olives and eggs in silence, but at length, as the pheasants were coming in, abruptly asked a rather unexpected question.

"Well, Domina—I suppose it is too late to put off to-morrow's banquet?"

"Quite too late, Domine. It could not be done. But what can make you wish to postpone it?"

"Then," rejoined Paratus, answering categorically, "I presume we must do as best we can with the other guests. But is it not vexatious? Strophius cannot come."

Strophius was to have been the lion of the evening, and Aurelia's face expressed her annoyance quite as clearly as her rather profane exclamation in reply. One of the slaves, startled by her sudden speech, or by the fact that his fellow-slave as he passed him bestowed on him a sharp pinch, let the turbot fall, and Aurelia, raising herself from her couch, rewarded him by a box on the ear.

"By Hercules, Domine, but this is too bad!" resumed the lady, in the intervals between the eating, in a primitive and forkless manner, of the leg of a pheasant. "Why, the whole charm of our banquet departs with him! Rufus Maximus is a prosy old man, and Arrius Pamphilius never says a word that is worth hearing. Why cannot Strophius come?"

"He has promised to sup with Caius Cuspius Pansa; and I am afraid some of our other guests will be invited also. I met Pansa at the thermæ this afternoon, and he did me the honour to ask me; but I told him I was bound to sup with Cneius Paratus Agricola and the Domina Flavia Aurelia Cotta—for to that we shall be reduced if the Ædile invite all our intended visitors."

"How tiresome of the Ædile!" said Aurelia. "If he had only told you yesterday, what trouble it would have saved us!"

Paratus shrugged his right shoulder in a resigned manner, and helped himself with his fingers to more turbot.

"This is annoying!" said Aurelia again. "Didianus, go and tell Actius that I must see him immediately. Bid him come to me here at once,—but for how long, Domine, is the banquet to be postponed? Would the next day answer as well, because in that case some things would keep?"

"N—o, I do not think it would," said Paratus with some hesitation. "Pansa said something about asking Strophius to pay him a visit at his villa near Retina; so we must hardly after that invite him for the next evening. You had better make arrangements, Domina, for postponing the banquet indefinitely, and I will try to see Strophius early in the morning and find out when he can come. Let me see—do you suppose he would be visible by the first hour? Do authors rise any later than other men?"

"Earlier, I should rather think," said Aurelia, taking a tartlet.

"I don't know that," answered Paratus; "men who write by lamplight in August won't be in a hurry to turn out of bed when they hear the breakfast-cakes cried. Here is Actius."

Ladle in hand, and face red from the fire, entered the master-cook.

"Well, Actius," said Aurelia, in a rather vexed tone of voice, "the Dominus Strophius sups to-morrow with the Ædile Pansa.

So our banquet must be put off. How far have you got in your preparations?"

"Nothing in the world that will spoil, Domina!" said Actius, with a flourish of the ladle: "only the stuffings and sauces, and the sweets. Some of the articles will come in admirably for supper to-morrow, and the rest may yet keep for the banquet, if it be not put off too long."

"As to that," returned Aurelia, "the Dominus will see the Dominus Strophius in the morning, and we shall then know what day he can come. Then you will arrange the matter, Actius, as you best can."

Actius bowed, and retired with the ladle.

Supper being over, Paratus and Aurelia amused themselves by taking an evening stroll on the terrace beyond the ecus; while the girls retired to the ala, and resumed their work. Then Paratus threw himself on a couch in the atrium, and summoned all the slaves to his presence. Any requests, complaints, or necessities of any among them, were laid before him; and having thus passed in review before their master, each slave wished him good-night, and retired. Aurelia, on hearing from the ala, whither she had retreated, their departing footsteps, ordered the girls to bed, and going into the atrium, clapped her hands for the attendant slaves. It was scarcely yet dark, but the slave-girls, Libia, Flora, and Sophronia, brought lamps in their hands, each lighting her respective mistress to her chamber.

The bed-chamber to which Camilla, attended by Sophronia, repaired for the night, would be considered a very small room indeed according to modern ideas of comfort. It was lighted by a single window six feet from the floor, and its sole furniture consisted of two beds, and one seat placed between them. The bedsteads were long and narrow, and raised so high from the floor, that three steps were necessary to enable the owner to reach her resting-place. Their material was ebony, and they were ornamented with figures in low relief. On the bedstead was laid a thick soft feather-bed, and on this a pillow in an embroidered pillow-case. There was no bolster. Two quilts covered the bed, purple in colour, and embroidered with gold. The other bed was rather less richly adorned; it formed Camilla's sofa by day, and

Sophronia's bed by night. Undressing was a quick performance to a Roman lady, and Camilla was ready for sleep in a few minutes. Private prayers were ceremonies of which she had no idea: and in passing the family altar before she came up-stairs, she had already offered worship to the Lares and infernal gods. So she quietly composed herself to sleep, while Sophronia, passing out into the ante-chamber, took up her position in the most retired corner, and standing with uplifted face, offered a long, fervent, silent prayer. This ended, she undressed, and creeping quietly into the bed-chamber, so as not to disturb her young lady, if she slept already, she lay down in the opposite bed.

"Sophronia, are you asleep?" said Camilla's voice, softly, a few minutes afterwards.

"No, Domina," answered the slave, starting up. "What does the Domina require?"

"Lie still; I only want to talk to you. What do you do every night in the ante-chamber, after I am in bed?"

"That is my time for prayer."

"For what do you pray?"

"Everything I need."

"I wish I knew how to pray as you do. Teach me."

"The Lord Himself will teach the Domina, if she ask Him."

"How shall I ask Him?"

"As the Domina has asked me."

Camilla was silent for a few moments. Then she said,—"I will try." Sophronia made no reply, and the two soon sank to slumber.

Rising in the morning was a longer and less easy process than undressing at night, for the toilet of a Roman lady involved a most liberal and elaborate use of cosmetics and beautifying appliances of all kinds. But in the early times of the Empire these were not so universally employed as when, in after ages, the great Pagan city was tottering to its fall. Camilla accordingly neither painted her face in the morning, nor covered it with a paste of ass's milk for the night. She contented herself with paying a visit to the bath-room and being scented all over; after which her hair was dressed rather elaborately by Sophronia, she

assumed her subucula and stola, and came downstairs ready for family prayer.

Paratus, in his capacity as priest towards his own household, stood ready to officiate at the altar on the north of the atrium. The slaves were all assembled in the latter apartment, to which Aurelia and her daughters had already repaired. I have said, *all* the slaves; but one was absent. Paratus, an easy-tempered man, who never troubled himself to interfere with the doings or opinions of others so long as they did not clash with his own dignity or convenience, had readily acquiesced in Sophronia's timid petition that she might absent herself from the household devotions, at which, as a Jewess, her religion did not permit her presence. Paratus wore a sacrificing robe, and in his right hand he held a box of incense. Each member of his household, approaching the altar, took from the box a pinch of the incense, and threw it on the flame which burned on the altar, saying as he did so, "Be propitious to us, O Jupiter, whether thou art god or goddess." When all had sacrificed, they turned their faces to the east, and covered them in their palila, while Paratus recited various prayers, the attendants repeating them after him in a lower tone. Then followed more sacrifices to various other gods and goddesses, concluding with one addressed "to the fortunes of Cæsar." These over, a hymn of praise was chanted by the younger members of the household in honour of Juno, the voices of Marcia and Camilla leading the chant. The prayers lasted above an hour, and were finished about five A.M. It will be seen that even in heathen eyes "the sacrifice was not prayer, but a preparation for prayer." The work of the law written in their hearts taught even these ignorant men that the Deity must be propitiated before He could be petitioned.

The family devotions concluded, Paratus wrapped himself in his pallium, and quitted the house. Aurelia, who had a somewhat non-Roman weakness for an early breakfast, summoned Libia, and bade her bring into the peristyle a basin of polenta, a jug of milk, and some of the hot breakfast-cakes which were being cried in the streets, and left at the doors of regular customers. On these cakes the bakers were accustomed to stamp their names with a metal die, thus practising the art of printing

without knowing it. Marcia ordered bread and milk, with some roasted eggs; but Camilla, who preferred to defer her meal till later, went back to her work in the ala, which this morning consisted of painting. In another hour she reappeared, and despatched Sophronia for food; for breakfast among the Romans was not a family meal, but a little light refreshment taken as might best suit the convenience of the eater. Paratus rarely breakfasted at all: and on this occasion he did not present himself at his own house till dinner-time,—that is to say, noon. He came. however, laden with news. During the seven hours which his absence had lasted, he had seen Pansa and Strophius, had attended an exciting trial in the Court of Law, and had lounged about the Forum, entering into conversation with those who, like himself, were employed in killing time. On returning home he changed his dress, washed his hands in scented water, and put on a pair of loose slippers instead of his sandals. He was now ready for dinner, which was served in the triclinium, and consisted of eggs, turtle-doves, a goose, fish, and vegetables.

"Well, Domine, have you seen Strophius?" inquired Aurelia the instant he entered.

"I have, my dear," replied Paratus, extending himself on the couch with an air of languid weariness. "I hope those rascals won't be long with dinner; I am frightfully hungry."

"Flora shall go and hasten them," replied Aurelia. "But what does Strophius say?"

"What I hope will be agreeable to the Domina Aurelia—That he cannot sup with us for three weeks to come. He is going with Pansa to his villa at Retina, but will return before his final departure for Rome."

"He ought to be ashamed, and Pansa too. Nothing but olives will keep for three weeks."

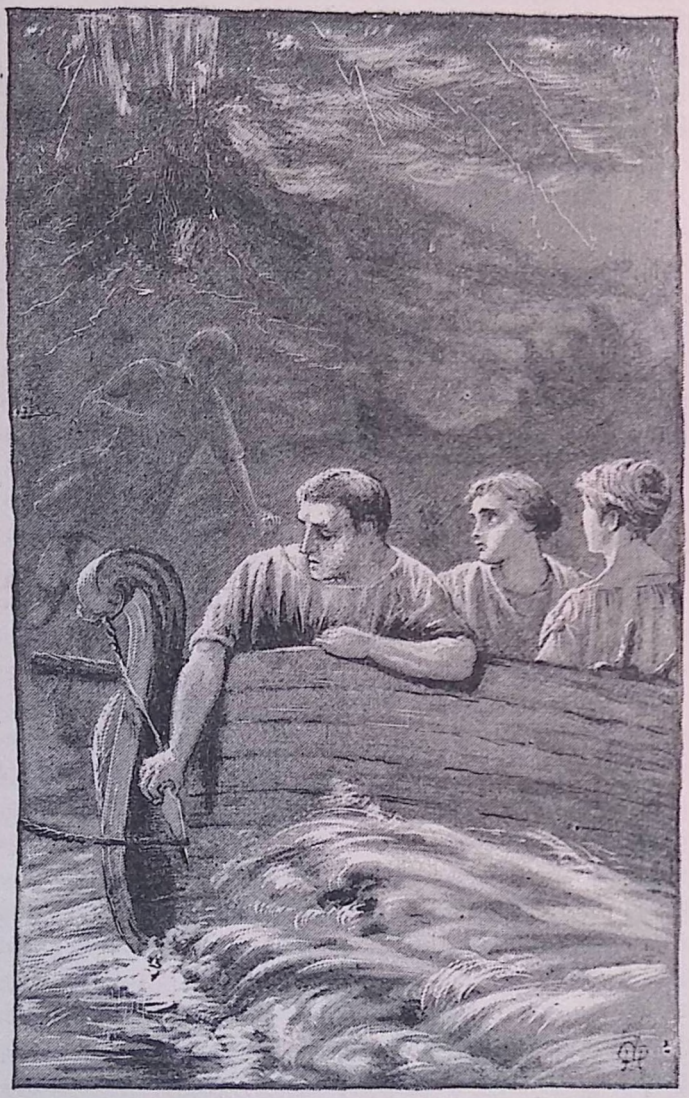
"Least of all, a lady's temper. Well!"

"Don't talk about my temper!" said Aurelia rather sharply.

"No, my dear, I won't," returned Paratus.

"What do you mean by that?" asked the lady.

"My dear, it is extremely warm!" said Paratus languidly, as



Just as the boat began to move a man came flying with headlong speed, and with one bound alighted in the boat.—*Page* 51.

if it were a weariness to him to speak. "Daughters, you must eat up the placentæ."

"Trust us for that, Father!" laughed Camilla, who was Paratus's pet and spoiled child.

"We must eat up everything," returned Aurelia, not so sharply as before. "Did you ascertain whether our other guests could come at the time convenient to Strophius?"

"Only Rufus Maximus, whom I met at the Forum; but Pansa has promised to come himself with his visitor."

"The Ædile! The banquet will be even grander than we proposed," said Aurelia in a gratified tone.

"Tell Actius to do his best," said Paratus, "for Pansa is accustomed to sup on peacocks and brooding hens every evening."

Aurelia laughed, and turned her attention to the goose.

After dinner, the whole family thought it an absolute necessity to take a siesta. Paratus ordered a couch to be brought into the peristyle, declaring it too hot everywhere else; Aurelia reposed in the ala with the curtain undrawn; Marcia and Camilla preferred repairing to their bed-chambers. When his slumbers ceased, the master of the house took a ride on horseback, and afterwards joined in a game of tennis: and it may be remarked in passing, that stirrups and saddles were unknown to Paratus and his contemporaries, who rode with no further convenience than a cloth fastened round the body of the horse. At the ninth hour (3 p.m.) a shrill bell, sounding all over Pompeii, announced the opening of the baths, the doors of which were instantly thronged. Paratus, who would as soon have dreamed of going without his dinner as without his bath, paid his daily visit to the establishment, and came home to spread a lavender scent all over the house.

The day on which the long delayed banquet was to be given to Strophius and Pansa had been fixed for the 23rd of August. Meantime the provision for the former banquet had to be consumed, and finding more time than she had previously calculated on, Aurelia suddenly resolved upon having a new costume for the occasion—one of the light supper-robes in use at that time, but so elaborately worked and decorated, that a fortnight after its commencement, Marcia declared pettishly that she hated the very sight of it, and Camilla rather more good-humouredly

remarked that she would not wish to see a needle for some time after its completion. The robe was of the most delicate tint of pale blue, nearly white, and the embroidery was executed in blue and silver. Actius was extremely busy, in conjunction with Cœnis, the elderly female slave, in concocting such a bill of fare as he thought would please his owners, since Aurelia had given orders that the deferred banquet was to be ten times more sumptuous and costly than the one originally contemplated. Accordingly he struck out all the common everyday things, such as venison, pheasants, ducks, turtle-doves, lobsters, and turbot; substituting in their stead the following elaborately prepared and (to a Roman palate) delicious dishes: Fried grasshoppers; a porpoise; capons' livers steeped in milk; flamingoes' tongues; snails; white maggots bred in old timber (this was one of his choicest dishes); sucking puppies. These, with a brooding hen, a peacock, mullet, sturgeon, a pig half boiled and half roasted, thrushes, and the other minor *entremets* which had been mentioned for the previous entertainment, Actius thought, might do even for such a guest as the Ædile. The rarest wines were cooled in ice to be ready for the banquet; all the slaves who were to wait at table received new clothing for the occasion; Actius and Cœnis, upon whom the chief responsibility devolved, were up early and late for some days before the time appointed; while Aurelia was here, there, and everywhere. She appeared almost ubiquitous, and went through an amount of hard work which would have daunted most of her dependants.

"Really I am sorry," remarked Aurelia one evening, "that I am obliged to leave you girls so much to yourselves. You ought to have a chaperone. Since old Domitiana died, I thought I could perhaps look after you myself, and you have arrived at what ought to be years of discretion: but I do not like this way of going on, and when this banquet is off my hands I shall look out for some one. If only one could put one's head out of doors without being completely scorched up! How much longer can this drought last?"

The drought did not last much longer: but it broke up in a manner anticipated neither by Aurelia nor any one else.

CHAPTER V.

FROM LIGHT TO DARKNESS.

"Doomsday is near, and all the heavens are falling."—*Old Play.*

ONLY a few days remained before the banquet. The atmosphere was troubled, and so were the minds of men. Slight shocks of earthquake continued at times to shake the houses. Strange noises were audible, both in the air and under ground. Some inhabitants declared that they had seen giants a dozen feet in height hovering in the sky, and were certain that some dreadful calamity was impending over the country. The majority only laughed at them; and among those who believed, or professed to believe, their story, not one took any means to escape from the doomed city. The air grew heavy, the atmosphere lurid, the sun more scorching than ever. Many citizens who had country houses quitted the stifling streets of the town for the purer air of the villa: yet even there the purity existed rather in imagination than in reality.

The day appointed for the banquet rose as one of the very hottest, driest, most unendurable days of all that unendurable summer of A.D. 79. The dust and sand blew blindingly through the streets, the sea roared and flung its waves about as if in anger, and the sky gave the impression to every one who saw it that a terrible thunderstorm would come before the following morning. The strange underground and atmospheric noises continued more decidedly and mysteriously than ever.

As the day wore on, the indications of a thunderstorm deep-

ened and increased; and the wild roar of the sea breaking on the shingle might be heard far off. But in the house of Paratus, at least, every one was too much occupied to take any notice of the coming storm. By three o'clock the heavy part of the work was over. Both Paratus and Aurelia then paid a visit to the thermæ, and afterwards dressed for supper; Aurelia presenting herself in her new embroidered robe, with gold bracelets, necklace, and ear-rings, pearls and rose-buds being mingled in her hair. Paratus too was splendidly attired in a white robe, with purple slippers. The slaves wore their new dresses, and had wreaths of roses on their head. The ecus, where the party were to sup, had been carefully perfumed with scented waters; the tables were of thyine, or citron-wood, and rich inlaid marbles, with sconces of silver. At the end of the room was a large and a handsome buffet piled up with plate; and the corners were occupied by vases of lilies and roses. The dice, intended for the amusement of the guests in the intervals between the courses, were on a small table ready to be brought forward; and round the apartment stood the slaves, either girt with napkins to wait upon the guests, or bearing large fans to cool them.

Marcia and Camilla retired to the ala,—for their presence at the banquet would have been considered a great impropriety—and drew the thick claret-coloured curtain which at the pleasure of the occupants shut off that apartment from the atrium; Flora and Sophronia following, to attend upon them. Lucipor, one of the slave-boys, was appointed to be at their service, and received orders to bring to the ala, on their dismissal from the ecus, such dishes as the young ladies might choose—thrushes excepted, which no Roman maiden was allowed to taste until she reached the dignity of matronhood.

As the sisters crossed the atrium, Camilla looked up through the compluvium, and saw what a wild, weird, fearful-looking evening it promised to be.

"Look, Marcia!" she exclaimed. "What a lurid sky! Is anything coming?"

"A thunderstorm, no doubt," was the response. "I hope our guests will not be frightened away. I should say there is sure to be a violent storm before morning."

Camilla sat down quietly in the ala; but Marcia, who was naturally of a more inquisitive disposition than her sister, took up her position close to one side of the curtain, whence, by a withdrawal of the heavy drapery too slight to reveal her presence, she could see the guests as they passed from the atrium to the peristyle.

The abode of Paratus—mistakenly known to modern visitors as the House of Pansa the Ædile, which it certainly was not, but that of his friend Paratus—was one of the handsomest houses in Pompeii. Like all good Roman houses, it consisted of a vestibulum; an ostium or inner hall; a large square atrium, which was the general living-room alike for family or guests; the peristyle, which may be compared to a drawing-room; and two triclinia, or dining-rooms, the smaller used in winter, and the larger in summer. The summer triclinium was of the kind known as an ecus, and opened on the garden beyond. The rooms already mentioned followed each other in a straight line; but from both atrium and peristyle opened on either side smaller rooms, such as lay entirely open known as alæ or wings, and those which had doorways being bed-chambers. All these were capable of being closed by curtains. From the peristyle and one of the alæ, a passage led to a side door.

The guests began to arrive a little before four o'clock. Most of those who came first were already known to Marcia by sight, and some were old family friends. The two lions of the evening, the author Strophius and the Ædile Pansa, were among the last to present themselves.

"O Camilla!" whispered Marcia, dropping the curtain, "he doesn't look a bit like my idea of an author. He is neither tall nor handsome. Rather a short man, with a round beard and a brown complexion, and nothing particular in his face. He isn't half as good-looking as the Ædile."

Marcia, having satisfied her curiosity, now condescended to sit down and appease her hunger. Dish after dish were brought in by Flora, as they were handed to her by Lucipor, Sophronia remaining inside to supply any want that might arise. Marcia, who loved good eating, declined almost everything until the pig should appear—a dish of which she was particularly fond.

But when the dish which ought to have immediately preceded this was withdrawn, the pig did not come. There was evidently something going on outside. They heard voices as if in alarm, and at length Cœnis said audibly, "The gods help us!"

"Do go out, Sophronia, and see what is the matter!" cried Marcia, impatient for her favourite delicacy.

Sophronia was about to obey, when a sound louder than a dozen claps of thunder—a crash as if all Campania were broken up and falling—a roar like the roar of a hundred lions—broke on the ears of the terrified girls. The next moment the curtain was pushed violently aside, and a man unknown to the girls made his appearance, with Paratus himself behind.

"Go with this gentleman, daughters!" he cried, hurriedly, his face white as ashes. "I put you in his care; obey him as you would me. I must save your mother."

The girls sprang up, pale and trembling, as Paratus disappeared.

"Escape for your lives!" peremptorily said the stranger. "The mountain is on fire!"

"Oh, cannot we be safe in Pompeii?" faintly murmured Camilla.

"Safe!" was the abrupt response. "There will be no such place as Pompeii by morning light! Come, all of you who value your lives—there is not a moment to be lost!"

Out, wildly hurrying, through the peristyle, by the side door, into the Via Sacra, the man forced the horrified maidens. But at the threshold Camilla paused, and let the rest pass her.

"My father! my mother!" she faltered. "Where are they? Let me stay with them!"

"The gods aid them!" answered the stranger. "It is every man for himself to-night. Come on!"

And seizing the hand of the hesitating girl, he ran swiftly down into the street.

"O my father! my father! I cannot leave thee!" wildly cried Camilla, trying in vain to break loose from the rough but kindly grasp wherein she was held.

"Domina!" whispered the soft voice of Sophronia close to

her, "it will do them no good to die with them. Look,—pray,—and go on!"

Camilla looked up for an instant, in the direction indicated by Sophronia, and just caught one glimpse of Vesuvius. She saw a column of fire springing up into the air, whence huge, red-hot stones and showers of burning cinders were cast upon the plain beneath: and she made no further attempt to evade the efforts of him who was endeavouring to save her.

On reaching the Via Sacra, the stranger glanced up and down the street, and then instantly selected the western road. Marcia exclaimed at this, remarking that the eastern direction, through the Forum, would be much better.

"No," answered the stranger abruptly: "the Forum is already crowded. There is more chance of escape for us by the Herculaneum Gate."

"Where are you going, Domine?"

"To the only place where there is any hope of life—the sea. Don't ask me questions, but come along as fast as you can."

Hurrying up the Via Sacra, and out at the Herculaneum Gate, the fugitives found themselves, when they had got clear of the tombs and villas which stretched beyond the Gate, on the broad line of the Via Appia. As soon as the structures ceased the stranger, followed by the girls, struck across the first open ground to which he came, and ere long they stood on the beach. The terrible roaring of the mountain was distinctly heard; and the torrent of red-hot lava, which poured from the summit in a south-westerly direction, showed like a bright fiery streak against the lurid sky. The clouds of smoke and ashes obscured the sun as in an eclipse; and though it was barely six o'clock on an August afternoon, the light was scarcely sufficient to distinguish faces. The immense stones, which the crater cast forth in all directions, had scarcely yet reached the shore where the little band stood, but the hot ashes were beginning to fall sparingly about them. Marcia had caught up a thick woollen palla which lay in a corner of the room, in which she wrapped herself; but Camilla was only in her stola—a poor protection from the hot ashes.

On arriving at the shore, the stranger made towards a boat

which lay close at hand. The citizens were now hurrying by dozens to the sea. Others sought the open fields, where most of them were killed by the burning stones. Many—women especially—shut themselves up in the most retired parts of their houses, and their death was the most terrible of all. The man who headed our little group sprang into the boat, never pausing to inquire whose it was, but glad to seize upon it before any one else could do so. On that awful night, every man considered that his own property by which he could save his life.

As the women stepped into the boat, trembling with fear, they discovered that another had added herself to the group. This proved to be Flora, who was carrying a burden rolled up in a napkin. They took her in without any questions, and the stranger, drawing a short sword from under the festal robe which he still wore, cut the rope which bound the boat to the strand. Just as she began to move, a sixth figure came flying with headlong speed from the Herculaneum Gate, and with one bound alighted in the boat. For an instant the sisters hoped that it might be their father: but as the new-comer seated himself before them and seized an oar, they saw that he had the face of a stranger.

"Pull away, whoever you are!" shouted the leader.

It was necessary to speak loud, for a confused medley of noises was all around—the roar of Vesuvius, the screams of the frightened women on the shore, the shouts of the men trying to collect their families for escape.

"Pull away!" he repeated. "I am glad of you, for men's hands are better than women's at this work, and this is not a night for an oar to lie idle."

The new-comer obeyed, but in a minute he said to the other, whose name he seemed to know.—"Where are you going, Domine?"

"Nay, by Bacchus! I don't know," returned Strophius. "Any whither out of the reach of yon burning mountain. I believe I was pulling in the direction of Herculaneum, but whether so frail a boat as this could ever get there——"

"The boat might," replied the stranger, "if all else were as easy. But how are we to reach it? Look behind you."

Strophius did so, and uttered a cry of horror. The promontory to the west of Pompeii, where two hours before had stood Herculaneum and Retina, was now one sheet of living fire.

"With your leave, Domine," resumed the new-comer, "we must pull in precisely the opposite direction. You are coasting too closely."

And, suiting the action to the word, he put the boat about, and it flew through the water in the direction of Stabiæ.

"But what are you doing, and where are you going?" exclaimed Strophius. "You are pulling away from the shore into the open sea—we shall be lost!"

"Better death by water than by fire," laconically answered the stranger.

Just as he spoke, a red-hot stone, weighing many pounds, dropped hissing and sparkling into the water within a yard of the boat.

"You are answered, Domine. We are too near the shore, even yet."

And to the evident uneasiness of Strophius, and alarm of the girls, he rowed still further out into the bay, Strophius following his lead even while he protested. For a few minutes longer they rowed in silence.

The sea, which through the day had been unusually violent, was now comparatively calm. Nature appeared to have relieved her pangs by the wild outburst of stones, ashes, fire, and smoke, which continued to pour forth like a torrent from the crater of Vesuvius. What had been Herculaneum was now burning lava; darkness like midnight hung over what was yet Pompeii. Sun, moon, and stars were invisible, and it was impossible to judge whether it were night or day. A thick cloud of smoke and dust was spread over the whole sky. It was just light enough in the boat to discern one object from another. Marcia had thrown her thick palla over her head, and had bent her head upon her knees, so that a heap of brilliant scarlet only betokened where she sat.

"Who are you, and how do you know my name?" Strophius at length abruptly demanded of the stranger.

"The Dominus Strophius is known now to most in Pompeii,"

was the reply. "But I am only a stranger there, and my story may be told in a few words. I am a Latin by descent, but a Greek by birth. My father, a Roman citizen, settled at Corinth, where I was born; and my name is Marcellus Victor. My father left me a little property, all of which I unfortunately laid out at Rome a few months ago in the purchase of merchandise, which I hoped to sell to a profit in Corinth. In returning to Greece, the ship which bore me and my little fortune was wrecked, and I was thrown ashore, having saved only my life, on the coast of Campania. I walked to Pompeii, in the hope of obtaining alms which might enable me to return to Greece, where only I am known, and where some of my father's friends might perchance help me to something whereby I could obtain a livelihood. Between begging and working, I collected enough for my passage, and should have set out some weeks ago, had I not suddenly been seized by sickness, which consumed nearly all my fund, and left me almost penniless, thus obliging me to set to work again to obtain money for my journey home. I have now recovered from the illness which attacked me, but had only gathered a few denarii, when—— you know what has come to-night."

"You appear, then, to have been an unhappy man," remarked Strophius. "The Goddess Fortuna has been unpropitious to you."

The only answer of Victor was, "The night is coming on rapidly. Dominæ, have you anything to wrap yourselves in? and have we any food?"

Food! who had thought of it!

"I have a palla," said Marcia, lifting her head. "Here, Camilla, come and wrap yourself up in this with me. The slave-girls will do as they are. As to food, I am afraid no one brought any."

Camilla gladly accepted her sister's invitation to share her palla, for she began to feel the cold exceedingly, and was not accustomed at any time to be out of doors with so slight a covering as her stola afforded.

"No food!" echoed Strophius in dismay.

"Yes, Domine," responded Flora in a doleful voice from the

stern of the boat. "I had the coptæ in my hand to bring in to the young ladies, when that horrid crash came, and I thought whether the world was coming to an end or not, we didn't need to lose them—so here they are."

"And I caught up two loaves, which are in the bosom of my tunic," said Sophronia.

The Roman loaf was a round, flat cake, not unlike a large muffin in shape.

During this little dialogue, Victor had been using one hand to divest himself of his pallium, a thick white woollen wrapper, and now handing it to Flora, he said as respectfully as if the slave girl had been a lady of high degree,—

"If you will take this, and your companion will come beside you in the stern, the pallium will cover both of you."

Flora stared at Victor in speechless amazement: but Sophronia answered quickly,—"Oh no, Domine, we cannot think of such a thing! You will feel the cold, and we are only slaves, and are accustomed to hardships. We both thank you most humbly for the generous offer."

"I shall certainly not feel cold while I am rowing," was Victor's answer, "and you can scarcely be more accustomed to hardships than I am. Do as you please: I shall not use it."

He added a few words in Greek, among which Camilla fancied that she caught the mystic "'Ιχθύς," and she immediately guessed that their new friend was a Christian. She was confirmed in the idea by observing the instant effect of the low-toned words on Sophronia, who, merely repeating her thanks, took up the warm garment and changed her seat, so as to wrap it round herself and Flora.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FUGITIVES FIND A HOME.

"We stand and pass
On to some end which yet we cannot see."
— Mrs. Hamilton King.

THE air was still thick and obscure when day-light broke. Still the shower of ashes poured down on the shores of the bay; but the bay itself was left behind by this time. A very natural query now presented itself for solution. What were they going to do? Where, and how soon, could they hope to land? No one could answer these questions. Two things only were certain—that they could not cruise about without food for an indefinite time, and that it would be certain death to attempt a landing until the eruption was over. Marcia was piteously entreating to be put ashore anywhere—in an uncivilised country, or on an uninhabited rock—it mattered not: anything, even red-hot cinders, was preferable to the horrible sensations from which she was suffering. Strophius, too, unaccustomed to rowing, complained that he was worn out by his night's work. Daylight had scarcely reached its full development when one of the oars was dropped from his numbed hand. He tried to recover it, nearly causing the boat to capsize in the attempt; but just as it appeared to be safely shipped, the oar, which was old and much used, snapped right in two. There was a disaster! There was no twine by which it could be pieced. Strophius took off his girdle, and tried in vain to bind the broken halves together; but at last he was obliged to recognise the effort to be useless. They were now reduced to three oars.

Victor plied his earnestly a little while longer; but before another hour had passed, he saw that one of them was cracked all the way up. Laying it down, he took up the fellow to the oar broken by Strophius, with a faint hope that they might manage to reach land before the remaining pair of oars should fail, as Strophius agreed that it was better to make land even in such danger than to risk certain starvation on the sea with no means of landing when the danger was over. Accordingly Victor pulled towards the shore, keeping as much to the east as he dared venture to do. Stabiæ was in sight, and the boat seemed to be gliding softly and safely towards the shore, when without a moment's warning, the third oar snapped in two.

"Lost!" exclaimed Strophius.

"Not yet," said Victor calmly. "Will you pass me the cracked oar?"

Strophius obeyed, but it proved as unworthy as its fellows. Not half-a-dozen strokes had been made, when the crack widened, and the oar was completely spliced nearly the whole way up. Victor laid it down, with what seemed to his companions inexplicable composure.

"We cannot land," said he quietly, "unless the wind spring up and drive us ashore: and there seems no likelihood of that."

"What is to become of us?" broke from Strophius and Marcia, emphasized by a shrill scream from Flora.

"We can only drift now," answered Victor. "Possibly some ship may yet pick us up."

"Oh, will they put us ashore at once?" wailed poor Marcia.

"No, that is not likely. We shall have to go whither the ship is bound, if it be to Joppa or the Cassiterides."

"And if no ship come near us?" asked Strophius, with drawn brows and set lips.

"If not, death!" said Victor in the same quiet tone.

Marcia shuddered, and nestled close to her sister, as if the frail arms of another human creature could protect her from the King of Terrors.

"Death!" she whispered: "death! I am afraid of death—I have never thought of death. Must we die? Will none of the gods take pity on us?"

"Death!" echoed Strophius in the same startled tone as that of Marcia. "Die of hunger on the water, within sight of land! Can you give us no better hope than that, young man? I am no sailor; I know nothing of sea affairs."

"To bid you hope any further, would be to deceive you," was Victor's reply.

"But cannot we move the gods to pity?" moaned Marcia again. "We cannot offer sacrifice, but we can make vows."

"Can we fulfil them?" said Strophius cynically.

"We have nothing," added Camilla drearily.

"And that is a price for which the gods do not barter their favours," sneered Strophius.

"Oh, for mercy's sake, do not brave the gods!" cried Marcia. "Now that we are in such dreadful need—if they should hear you, they will drown us all!"

Strophius answered by a shrug of his shoulders.

"Oh, if we could but offer sacrifice!" groaned Marcia. "I am so frightened! I dare not die!"

The supreme moment of her life had come. And as all men do in that supreme moment, she recognised the awful position of an unclothed soul—the impossibility of standing before God without an atonement. Men may sneer at what they blasphemously call "sanguinary theology," and count the Blood of the Covenant an unholy thing: but bring them suddenly face to face with death, and they will sneer no more. Unless, indeed, they are so wrapped up in the garment of self-righteousness that only death itself can tear the folds apart.

Camilla looked up, and saw a corresponding expression to that of Marcia on the faces of Strophius and Flora, only varied in the former by a dogged, determined set of the lips, as though he were resolved not to acknowledge it. But his eyes allowed it in spite of his stubborn mouth. Glancing thence to the countenances of Sophronia and Victor, she was struck by the total difference of expression. These faces were both calm as the summer moonlight. Not a ripple of anxious care, despite their evident suffering from severe fatigue, broke the perfect peace which sat on brow and lips.

"Is this the difference between us and Christians?" said

Camilla to her own heart. "Then I would I were one of them! It would be worth the cost of life, if one could feel thus when death stands at the door!"

For in that first age of the primitive Church, as it is often seen to be in times of persecution, when the hope of Heaven was frequently all that a man had of comfort, it was far more living and energetic than in our easy times. The Christians with furrowed brows, and drawn mouths, and querulous voices, do not flourish under Diocletian half so well as under Victoria. Oh, what a responsibility is theirs who bring up an evil report of the good land, and keep the fresh young spirits of the world from desiring to taste its clusters of grapes! The murmurers, so sternly rebuked in God's Word, do even less harm to themselves than to others.

Silence fell for a time on the little party in the boat. Strophius sat with folded arms, his face evidencing that a battle was going on within him. Flora sobbed herself to sleep, resting against Sophronia. Marcia had slipped downwards, where she lay with her head upon her sister's knee, moaning at intervals, either from the uneasiness of her physical feelings or from the suffering of her mind. Victor too sat with wreathed arms, but his calm eyes scanned the horizon, now and then looking upwards, with as little visible concern as if he were one of a party of pleasure. Yet there was nothing approaching to hardness or flippancy either in him or Sophronia. It was merely a grave, contented quietness.

Strophius broke the silence at last, and with a joke, which was plainly assumed to hide his discomfort.

"The shore looks inviting, does it not?—at least so much as we can see of it. I doubt whether any inhabitants dwell here beyond crows and wild buffaloes. Perhaps we are as well here as over yonder."

"Could we not live on those?" wailed Marcia, half raising herself.

"The chances are that they would live on us," replied Strophius with a short, bitter laugh. "Make yourself easy, Domina Marcia; we can't get at them just at present. Heigh-ho! Well, *I* did not expect to die like a rat in a hole."

Marcia answered by a moan.

"Have you any idea of our bearings, Domine Victor? If we could go floating on in this style till we struck land, what land would it be?"

"Trinacria, I imagine, as the boat's head stands now."

"Can we live till we get there?"

"One or two might," said Victor in a low voice.

Another low moan from Marcia was the only answer. And so, all through that day, they drifted on.

When the night fell a second time, it sank upon a very weary and dispirited band of human creatures. The slight food had been consumed some hours before. The rain was beginning to fall; and the wind rose, and the boat fled fast before it, tossing up and down in a manner which added another to the burdens of the sufferers. Marcia was the greatest sufferer of the group, because both from temperament and education, she was the most self-indulgent. Camilla and Sophronia bore up better; Flora best of all, for she had at once the hardiest health and the hardest nature. Strophius had sunk into a condition which in a little child might be termed a fit of the sulks. Victor sat calm and still, doing what little he could to ease the feelings of the women, but not revealing his own thoughts.

They knew it could not be long before dawn should break on the second morning. Marcia's feeling, and that of Strophius also, was the wish of Ajax—"And if our fate be death, give light, and let us die!"

Now and then a heavy sigh broke from Strophius, or a low moan from Marcia; and Flora could be heard sobbing at intervals. The rest were silent. Suddenly Victor lifted his head, and after listening intently for a moment, to the astonishment of his companions, sent out over the sea towards the east, with all his remaining strength, a long shrill whistle.

"Is the man going mad?" growled Strophius.

But the next moment, in every heart sprang up a wild passion of hope, as a faint answering cry came over the distant waters. All the voices joined with their utmost power in the next shout, and for some minutes the cries responded to one another, the shout from the unseen coming every moment

clearer and louder. At length some large dark object could be seen approaching them through the faint gleam of dawn. But the Roman hearts of the maidens failed them a moment, when they were able to distinguish words in the stranger's shout, and heard that they were addressed in a foreign language. Victor, however, stood up and answered fluently in the same tongue; and Strophius uttered the explanatory word—"Greek."

Then Victor turned to his companions. "She is a merchantship of Corinth," said he; "and will take us there. It is well; I have friends at Corinth. Domina Marcia must be taken first."

Had any one present been in a state of mind for philosophy, he might have found it amusing to see how the learned, middle-aged Strophius tacitly admitted the leadership of young Victor. It was the natural power of the capable over the incapable, in such matters as came to hand. Had they been in a library, Strophius would just as naturally have been the prominent person.

Marcia was almost unable to stand, and quite unfit to help herself. A hammock was let down into the boat, in which she was slung up; and after her, the rest of the women were helped up one by one. Strophius followed, and Victor came last.

"Well!" said Flora, when they were safe on board, rolling up the large white napkin in which she had carried her cakes, "at any rate, I've saved *this!*"

One thought lay very heavy at the heart of Camilla, to whom it seemed unaccountable that Marcia never even alluded to it. What had become of Paratus and Aurelia? Why had they not joined them on the shore as they had purposed? Had they been unable to get out of the city, pressed back by the crush of people?—or had they perchance fled in the wrong direction, and been struck down by those red-hot thunderbolts which poured from the crater of the mountain? If it were only possible to know!

They met, somewhat refreshed by food and sleep, in the evening of the second day.

"Well!" said Strophius after his greeting, "may the merciful gods carry us safe to Corinth, for it seems to be Corinth where we are to go. Domine Victor, did you not say you had

friends there? I hope they will reward you for your trouble in getting at them."

"I hope they may. I have several friends at Corinth, but I must allow that I place very little dependence on any but one. That is a rich elderly man, of the name of Coriander,—an old bachelor, which is a very rare thing among us Greeks. He was for above thirty years a warm and intimate friend of my father, and was in former times indebted to him for a kindness which helped mainly to lay the foundation of his present prosperity. I think he is not the man to forget such an obligation, and he has frequently told me that in consequence of it, I might freely apply to him in any difficulty."

"If he be an old bachelor, I presume he has no ladies in his household?" inquired Camilla.

"Yes, his widowed sister and her daughter were living with him when I left Corinth. The daughter, of course, I never saw; but I did once see the widow, the Lady Electra, and she seemed to be a kind, motherly woman."

"Are ladies in Greece more secluded than in Italy?" asked Camilla.

"Decidedly," said Victor. "You might live a month in Coriander's house and never see him once."

This struck the Roman maidens as very odd. They had never mixed with their father's evening guests; but had any one been staying in the house, they would have seen him as a matter of course.

It was agreed among them that on their arrival in Corinth, Strophius should take charge of the ladies, while Victor went to see his friend with the least possible delay. Marcia continued to suffer so much that they feared serious illness for her, and it was desirable to get her safely and permanently housed without loss of time.

All except Victor were sorely tired of the sea when at last they sailed into the harbour at Corinth. They induced the captain to put them ashore in a small boat at a nearer point to Coriander's house than the quay to which he was bound; and there, having lifted Marcia on shore, they contrived a rough shelter from the sun by hanging Victor's pallium from boughs, and spreading her

own on the ground as a carpet. As soon as this was done, Victor set off to his friend's house, while the rest sat down on the beach by the side of Marcia, who was very weak, and moaning with pain. It was a weary waiting. Strophius, declaring that he was unutterably glad to be anywhere on dry land, stretched himself in the shade of a bush and went to sleep. Flora very soon, though without intending it, was seen lying prostrate in the same condition; so that Camilla and Sophronia were left virtually alone with the sufferer. Camilla felt rather nervous on finding herself in so unprotected a position in a strange country, and rose to look out for Victor several times before there was any possibility of his reappearance. But at last the perfect silence, the soft measured beat of the waves, and the sultry heat of a Greek summer afternoon, overpowered her also, as she sat leaning back against the tree. Even Marcia ceased to moan, and sank into a light slumber; and Sophronia kept watch alone.

She sat just at the edge of the palla, partially sheltered from the sun by the tall bush under which Strophius lay, the light darting through its openings to form flickering gleams upon her raven hair, as the wind softly moved the leaves to and fro. Her arms were clasped round her knees, her head uplifted to the heavens, and she was lost for the moment in a rapture of communion with God. It was a fair picture, and so thought somebody who came with noiseless step over the rank sea-side grass, and stood for a moment looking on her, unseen, before he spoke.

"How fair and how fearless she is!" was the thought of Marcellus Victor. "'She is not afraid of evil tidings; her heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.' I almost grudge to call her back to earth."

Before he had done so, Strophius suddenly awoke.

"Come back already!" said he.

"How long have you slept?" was the amused answer. "I have been away two hours. And here come Coriander's slaves with a litter, to carry Domina Marcia to his house."

"You found him, then?" asked Strophius in a gratified tone.

"And he will take us in?" added Camilla, whom their voices had awoke.

"I have found everything," replied Victor, sitting down near

them—"food, shelter, and Coriander. He was most kind, and seems quite anxious to receive me and all my friends, whatever their number, for any length of time we may find it convenient. He said twice that he could not have a greater pleasure than to befriend my father's son."

"How very kind!" responded Camilla.

"I hope his coffers are heavy!" said Strophius with a grim smile.

"They are," answered Victor, echoing the smile, though in a more genial manner. "I find that during my absence from Corinth, a distant relative of Coriander has bequeathed him a very large property, and he is now one of the wealthiest men in Greece. His sister, the Lady Electra, is dead, and his niece has married: but his house is not destitute of a lady, since he has himself recently married. His wife, I hear, is very young—little over twenty—exceedingly beautiful, and very lavish in her expenditure"

While Victor was speaking, a handsome litter, borne by six stout slaves, had been brought and set down near the group; and another slave, with a low flat basket upon his head, now approached and knelt before them, saying a few words which Victor translated.

"The Lady Irene greeted the stranger ladies, and begged them to refresh themselves, and come to her house."

The basket contained various kinds of light refreshments, and two of the tall two-handled silver cups commonly used in Greece. A second slave followed the first bearing a silver flagon of wine. The ladies were glad of the fruits of Irene's considerate kindness; and when they had finished their repast, and Marcia had been lifted into the litter, the slaves took up the poles by which it was borne, and the remainder of the little group followed on foot. A walk of about a mile and a half brought them to a superb suburban villa, surrounded by beautifully-planted grounds. Three or four female slaves came out to meet them, and after reverent obeisances, they lifted Marcia carefully from the litter, and bore her into the house, by signs requesting Camilla to follow. Flora and Sophronia remained behind.

The slaves carried Marcia into a rich apartment which opened

on the peristyle, and was separated from it by a curtain so elaborately embroidered in colours that it was not easy to judge which of them formed the groundwork. It was a spacious, handsome room, decorated much in the style to which the sisters had been accustomed at Pompeii, where Greek taste was the fashion, and Greek artists were largely employed. In a recess of the chamber, as if prepared for the occasion, lay a mattress, covered by a soft Persian carpet, and furnished with Carthaginian pillows; and here the slaves laid Marcia down, throwing over her a light covering. Then, still by signs, they invited Camilla to seat herself, and disappeared behind another curtain.

Camilla's feeling was rather like that of a dreamer. But ere many seconds had been given her for reflection, the drapery was again drawn aside, and a young, graceful girl, attired in the most magnificent style of Greek costume, advanced into the room. Camilla instinctively felt that this was Irene, and rose to make reverence to her hostess.

The taste of the Lady Irene was unusually florid for a Greek girl. The colours of her robe were brighter, the embroidery deeper, than were customary in ladies of this nation. But the pure Greek outline of her features forbade the idea that she could be of any other race, and so faultlessly beautiful were they that it was impossible to wonder at Coriander's choice, whatever the disparity in years.

Strange to say, it had never till that moment occurred to Camilla how very limited were her means of communication with her new friends. She had learned a few sentences of Greek from Sophronia, and was consequently just able to convey to Irene that she could not readily speak that language, and to suggest, in words which were very ungrammatical, and to the ear of the latter sounded very strange, that her attendant should be summoned as interpreter. Irene smiled graciously, bowed, and clapped her hands, in answer to which a slave immediately appeared, whom her mistress, speaking in a clear, musical voice, despatched for Sophronia. The latter, whom the slave ushered into the apartment in a few minutes, seemed a little amused with her new function of interpreter, and placing herself midway between Camilla and Irene, waited for one of them to

speak. Camilla was the first, and desired her to convey to the Lady Irene her feelings of gratitude and pleasure at the welcome which she had so kindly vouchsafed to them in their distress; and to ask her if she had been informed of the circumstances which had thus led them to require her generous hospitality. Irene, who as well as Camilla, had seated herself, answered that her husband had informed her of the circumstances under which they came, and that she was most happy to receive them; at the same time inquiring the nature of Marcia's illness, and remarking that Coriander had an excellent physician among his slaves. Camilla answered that she thought her sister's malady was more due to the shock and the subsequent exposure than to any positive disease, but that she and Marcia would both be grateful for a visit from a physician. Irene clapped her hands again, and commanded the slave who answered the summons to send in Dionysius.

The physician, after making a low bow to his mistress, examined the patient, and pronounced that she required rest more than anything else, but that he would also administer a decoction of herbs which might prove of service.

"Employ your best skill," said Irene as he was leaving the room, "or I shall tell your lord that he gave too much for you."

The poor physician retired with a slightly flushed brow and a silent reverence.

"I understand," said Irene to Camilla, "that it is the custom of the Latins for gentlemen to mingle more freely in the society of ladies than is the habit of us Greeks: and my husband, who thinks this will be agreeable to you, and regards the Lord Victor as his own son, has desired me to conform to your customs in this respect while you do us the honour to be our guests. We will therefore, if you please, join my lord in the peristyle: but the sick lady will very likely prefer to remain here with her own attendant."

Marcia was just then too ill to care for the society of any one, and she readily acceded to the suggestion of Irene. The latter therefore conducted Camilla into the peristyle, with Sophronia still in waiting as interpreter. Here they found, beside Strophius and Victor, an elderly gentleman, fresh-com-

plexioned and benevolent-looking, whom Camilla easily guessed to be Coriander.

When the party were seated, and the introductions over, Sophronia modestly offered an inquiry whether her mistress would require her services as interpreter when Victor was present, and if she had not better go to Marcia, who was left without any means of communication with the outer world. Camilla assented, and Sophronia retired; but the former privately determined to learn all the Greek she could, in as short a time as possible, since it seemed very likely that the remainder of her life would be spent in Greece. Supper followed, a most sumptuous entertainment; and after supper the party repaired again to the peristyle, where Coriander requested that if agreeable to the party, Victor would give the history of his adventures since quitting Corinth. A last light meal followed later, and the party retired early, to Camilla being allotted the next chamber to that of her sister. Sophronia occupied a small bed in Camilla's room; but the latter could not help noticing that her attendant was unusually restless, and once when she awoke in the night, she fancied that she heard her sobbing.

"Sophronia!" she said.

"Domina!" answered the slave in a low tone.

"Are you ill, or does something trouble you? I thought I heard you sob."

"I am not ill, Domina—abundance of thanks! but the cause of my grief as yet I can utter to none but the Lord. Let the Domina not be angry with her slave to whom she is so good."

Camilla's attachment to Sophronia deepened every day, and she could not endure to see her in trouble.

"Can I remedy it, Sophronia?"

"No, sweet Domina. There is but one remedy, and that is in the hands of the Lord Christ. Perchance He may show me that the source of my sorrow is not so deep as it seems now. Whether or not, glory be to His holy name, who brings good out of evil, and the honey of righteousness from the bitter water of penitence. Sleep, I pray, sweet mistress, and question me no further."

And Camilla was asleep almost before she had finished wondering what could be the reason of Sophronia's distress.

CHAPTER VII.

A NOCTURNAL VISITANT.

" Sad losses have ye met,
But mine is heavier yet,
For a believing heart is gone from me."
—FRANCES BROWNE.

ON the following morning, Coriander discovered in the course of conversation that both Strophius and he were ardent lovers of music. He at once proposed to take him into the city, and to let him hear some of the best Corinthian singers: for which purpose they would find it convenient to sleep at his house in town, and not return till the following day. Victor declined to accompany them. He said that he was still very much fatigued, and should be glad of a day's quiet, to rest and think over his future intentions and prospects.

Camilla followed Irene to the atrium of her private apartments, at the back of the house, where they found Sophronia in waiting, who informed them that Marcia was still asleep, and then, at the bidding of her mistress, sat down on the floor between the two ladies. Irene took up her work—a piece of gorgeous embroidery; and on Camilla's expressing a wish not to be idle, invited her to help herself to the materials she preferred from a rich profusion on the table at her side.

As Camilla returned to her seat she glanced at Sophronia, seated on the floor by Irene's ivory chair. Her face was paler than usual, though she never had much colour; and her eyes looked heavy with weeping. But all at once Camilla was struck

by a fact which she had never noticed before—a faint, indefinable resemblance between the grave, pallid face of Sophronia, and the bright vivacious features of the beautiful Irene. She could not have said in what the likeness consisted, and the expression of the two countenances was as different as possible: yet now that she had once noticed it, it continued to strike her constantly. It was chiefly observable when Sophronia spoke, and when Irene was silent.

Irene's conversation for some time consisted of mere commonplaces; but after a little while she began to manifest a desire for information, questioning Camilla closely on many points pertaining to the customs and opinions of the Romans. About noon Marcia appeared, leaning on Flora, and declaring herself much better for the long rest. She still, however, seemed languid, and lay down on the Thessalonian mattress spread in the recess.

The sisters noticed that Irene appeared to have nothing to do except embroider and talk, and they presumed that Greek ladies left the management of their households to the slaves. Shortly before supper-time, a slave entered and knelt before her, whispering a few words, on which Irene begged to be excused for a moment, and left the atrium. The curtain had scarcely fallen behind her, when Marcia said, feebly, but with unusual vivacity for her—

"Camilla, you never would guess who our new friend and hostess is! Flora tells me—I can't imagine how she got to know, but slave girls will talk on their fingers if they cannot do it any other way—that she was a slave from the East, whom Coriander purchased for her beauty—isn't she lovely?—and he made her a freed-woman, and married her. Could you have supposed such a thing?"

Camilla had no time to reply, for as the last word escaped Marcia's lips, Irene returned, and suggested that they should now adjourn to the peristyle, where Victor might join them. She did not resume her embroidery, but sat and continued the conversation, playing as she talked with one of her bracelets—she wore many—until the string of the bracelet suddenly snapped, and the minute ornaments of which it was composed were scattered about on the mosaic pavement. Irene uttered

an exclamation of annoyance, while Sophronia rose from the floor, and gathering up the scattered articles, placed them in Irene's hand.

"Is not one missing?" asked Irene. "I think there should be another."

Sophronia searched a little further, and soon found the missing ornament, which had fallen close to Camilla's feet. As Sophronia picked it up, a half-uttered exclamation, which she instantly repressed, escaped from her, and Camilla, glancing at the ornament in her hand, saw that it was a little silver fish. Sophronia gave it to Irene, and instantly quitted the room. Just as she left it, Victor came up the steps into the peristyle.

"How very provoking!" said Irene.

"What is provoking!" inquired Victor.

Irene detailed the circumstances, adding, "I happen to know that a fish is the emblem of some superstitious sect; and I am afraid, from her manner, that the girl does too, and will probably set me down as being a follower of their doctrines, because I happen to have an ornament of that form in my bracelet!"

Camilla saw a very curious expression pass over Victor's face as Irene spoke, which led her to inquire what she had said. Victor translated the remark, and Camilla asked further what annoyance Irene anticipated from Sophronia's mistake?

"Oh, nothing particular," said Irene; "there is no persecution in Corinth. But I certainly should not like to be classed with those low people. All creeds except that of philosophers are more or less irrational; but the doctrines of the Christians appear to me the least rational of all."

"What is the creed of philosophers?" said Victor.

"You a Greek, and require to ask that!" exclaimed Irene.

"I am only half a Greek, and have been absent from Corinth for a long time. I should like to know what you believe."

"I believe, of course," answered Irene, "in common with all disciples of philosophy, that there is but one first great cause of everything, which is fate; that no man can change or evade his fate, and that death is possibly an entrance into some higher sphere, but more probably an ageful sleep."

"Then you do not believe in the gods?"

"The gods! What, believe in Zeus, Phœbus, Aphrodite? They are mere myths, beautiful allegories, designed for the instruction of the lower classes, who need something apparent to the senses; but *we*—we have outgrown such follies."

While Irene was speaking, Sophronia had re-entered the apartment, and had taken up her previous position, in readiness to obey the call of her mistress. Victor had not translated the last words of Irene, but Camilla could see by the expression of Sophronia's face, that they were discussing some subject painfully interesting to her.

"I presumed that you meant something of that kind," quietly responded Victor. "But may I ask whether these philosophical doctrines stand the test of life?"

"What! you are a believer in the old fancies? You pray to Phœbus to give you success in music and painting, and to Diana to reward your ardour in the chase! Is that so?"

"By no means. I am not a believer in what you call the 'old fancies,' but in the oldest religion of all, coeval with Him who made the earth and the heavens, even that which is from the beginning. I am one of the superstitious sect whom you so supremely despise."

Irene turned fully to the speaker and gazing intently on him, said, in tones which implied far more than her words,—"You are a Christian?"

"I am a Christian," was the quiet answer.

"I thought you had had more sense!" replied Irene, not in an animated voice, but in a low tone of contemptuous pity, only one remove from apathy.

"Is it quite proved who shows the most sense? Will you answer my previous question—Do these doctrines of yours stand the test of life?"

"What do you mean by the 'the test of life'?"

"I mean, will they avail you in all circumstances—console you in sorrow, and support you in death?"

"I have never had occasion to try them in either," was the rather flippant reply, "and therefore I cannot answer the question. But I suppose they would. I should have the consolation of reflecting that my fate was only the same as that of others,

At the side of her bed stood a tall slight figure dressed in pure white, and holding in her left hand a lamp, while with her right she shaded the light from the eyes of the slumberer.—*Page* 75.

and that no efforts of mine could avail to escape what was appointed for me by destiny."

"A most consolatory reflection, no doubt. Destiny, then, is your god?"

"Certainly not. Destiny is not a person, but an abstract idea."

"Then have you no God?"

"I have no God," answered Irene.

Victor sat silent for a moment. Then he said, in a low voice, as if to himself,—"'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.'"

The blood rushed for a moment to Irene's cheek when she heard this quotation.

"You have heard that before, perhaps?"

She turned her head to spread the coverlet straighter over the nearest couch. "Perhaps. Perhaps not."

"I think it was not altogether strange to you. When I was last in Rome, I heard a letter read, which I fancy you will not know, wherein mention was made of some who, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, had not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."

"Pray what has all that to do with me?" said Irene. "Philosophy knows nothing of righteousness, as you term it, otherwise than as a social virtue. Of course every man ought to be just to his fellows."

"Ought?—why? If there be no God to whom man is responsible, how can there be any *ought?*"

"Man is responsible to himself and to humanity."

"Very well. Then if I am responsible to myself, I can give myself leave to please myself. What a comfortable doctrine!"

"Of course you can, and should, so long as you do not interfere with other people. Happiness is the great aim of life."

"Who is to hinder my interfering with others?"

"Virtue, of course."

"But, on your principle, why should I be virtuous, if it do not please me? I thought happiness was to be the chief aim?"

"Well, happiness is secured by virtue and philosophy."

"Have you found it so?" said Victor very quietly.

Irene flushed scarlet.

"Because," added he, "when I tried that plan, I did not find it so. I failed to discover happiness anywhere but in God."

"What is the use of your talking to me about a God in whom I do not believe?" asked Irene in a peculiar tone.

"Because," said Victor in a tone intended only for her ears," "you do believe. Not with the heart, but with the head. These doctrines are not new to you: if I mistake not greatly, there was a time when you did believe them, and though you have tried since to shake them off, the broken links cling around you still. Aye, he who has known the truth can never be as though he had not known it. It must either be a golden chain to lead, or an iron chain to torture."

"I have heard all manner of doctrines, of all kinds of sects. My lord is a philosopher, and has friends in every school; and he tells me much they say to him. I may have heard some whims of your school among the others—if such a name can be given to such a superstition. Why should I not hear different views? You are not, I hope, so exclusive and uncharitable as to imagine that none but your own sect stand any chance of happiness in that future world which you expect? Be happy, if it make you happy, with your own faith, and leave me to mine."

"Your faith? Your unbelief, I think you mean. I am very uncharitable, as you use that phrase. I believe that they who shall be accounted worthy to stand in the resurrection can do it only through faith in the name of the Lord Christ."

"You exclude us, then, from any portion in your Heaven?"

"You exclude yourselves."

Irene was silent.

"Assuredly, Lady Irene," said Victor, "these doctrines are not unknown to you. You have heard me use words—nay, you have used them yourself—in senses which otherwise would have required explanation. May I ask how this is? Have you been acquainted with any Christians, or have you read the Scriptures of the Law of Moses?"

"I know nothing about it!" said Irene, rising suddenly with a flushed cheek. "Ladies, will you be pleased to pardon my absence for a short time? My slaves will need direction."

And, keeping her head turned away from them, she quitted the room.

"What have you been talking about all this while?" asked Marcia wearily from her couch, and Camilla's eyes looked the same question.

"Metaphysics," said Victor, with a rather dry smile.

"Metaphysics!" echoed Marcia in an astonished tone.

"Theology, if you prefer that term. I wish I could know how far the Lady Irene is acquainted with the Christian faith. That she does know something of its doctrines I am certain."

"Christian!" exclaimed Marcia. "Surely you have not been discussing the vile superstitions of those low fanatics! I wonder what you can find in them to interest you! I really should have thought, Domine, that a man of your intellect would not have taken pleasure in such topics."

"Do you understand the question, Domina Marcia?"

"No, indeed! I never meddle with such rubbish."

"Then I fear that I shall sink into a low fanatic in your eyes when you know that I am a Christian."

Marcia gazed at Victor with an expression of countenance which she might naturally have worn had he confessed himself a burglar. Camilla, who greatly admired his honesty and courage, gave him an approving smile.

"May the gods help us!" cried Marcia at last. "I think I never was so shocked in my life! To think of an educated gentleman not ashamed to be a Christian! I never heard of such a thing!"

"I am not ashamed of my hope," said Victor quietly.

"Why, Camilla!" added Marcia, as her eyes caught those of her sister, "I declare you are actually smiling! You do not look in the least shocked, nor even surprised."

"There is no cause," was the answer. "Dominus Victor has told us no more than I had guessed already."

Marcia was on the point of replying, when a slave presented herself to announce that supper was served in the Hall of Chryseis, so called from its being adorned with paintings illustrative of the history of that heroine; and Marcia reserved the rest of her indignation until after supper.

Irene took care during that meal, by monopolising the conversation, and directing it to insignificant subjects, that Victor should not resume the discussion. She withdrew to her own chamber a little earlier than usual, and lay down on her couch in a dissatisfied frame of mind. Irene hated contradiction, and Victor, though perfectly courteous in manner, had held his own in a very disconcerting way. She fell at length into an uneasy slumber, from which, while it was still perfectly dark, she was roused by a consciousness that light had suddenly entered her room. Irene opened her eyes, and was startled and almost frightened by the sight which she saw.

At the side of her bed stood a tall slight figure, dressed in pure white, and holding in her left hand a lamp, while with her right she shaded the light from the eyes of the slumberer. The glow thus fell on her own face and figure ; but before Irene could determine whose that thin, pale, grave face was, the voice of her visitor startled her again. The apparition spoke not in Greek, but in Syriac, and the words were—"Sleepest thou so calmly, daughter of Berenice?"

It was nine years since the Lady Irene had heard that language, or had been addressed by that name. Surprise overpowered every other feeling, and she could only gasp out—"Who are you?"

"Thou wouldst not have asked that question," answered the visitor, in a low, clear, plaintive voice, "nine years ago, when Alexander and Berenice dwelt by the sheep-gate in Jerusalem, and when Sophronia and Irene wandered hand in hand through the valley of Jehoshaphat! But that is all over now."

A low cry broke from Irene,—"Sophronia, sister!"

Sophronia set down the lamp, and kneeling by Irene's bed, buried her head in her sister's outstretched arms. For some moments both kept silence, and Irene spoke first.

"Is it thus I find thee, Sophronia, my sister, my dove? Thus, in bondage, while I sit in the purple? But this must be so no longer. I will purchase thy freedom, and robe thee with the robes of a Grecian maiden. There are changes, great and many, Sófia, since thou and I parted at Aleppo nine years ago ;

thou art changed, sweet sister—sadder and graver than of old: and I, too, am changed, am I not?"

Irene spoke affectionately, but her last words were uttered in a tone of ostentation. Sophronia lifted her head, and answered in a tremulous voice,—

"There are changes, my sister—many, and some sad: but the change in thee is the saddest change of all!"

"The saddest, Sófia! Nay, surely, thou jestest! Thou didst leave me at Aleppo in bonds and poverty; thou hast found me in a palace, the richest lady in Corinth, with an hundred slaves at my feet. Is that a change to grieve over?"

"Irene, hast thou remembered the dying words of Berenice our mother?"

Irene's silence remained unbroken, though she blushed. Sophronia continued in a more earnest tone.

"'Keep your garments white, my daughters'—were not these the last words of Berenice?—'and let me behold you in the Great Day on the right hand of the King, clad in pure and white vestures, emblems of the faith and purity wherein ye shall have walked before Him.' Irene, my sister,—*talitha!*—where is the robe of thine innocence, and hath it retained its whiteness?"

The colour flushed yet deeper over Irene's face and neck. But the silence remained unbroken.

"Whether thou wert sealed indeed unto salvation, the Lord knoweth, and not I," continued Sophronia. "He only knoweth them that are His. Nevertheless, when we parted at Aleppo, in thy words and in thine outward walk, thou wert of us. Hast thou continued with us—hast thou kept the faith? If it had been so, could I have heard thee speak such words as thou hast spoken this day? Thou speakest, indeed, of riches and costly robes; but where is that robe washed in the holy blood, costlier than all other? Hast thou forgotten the words of Solomon the King—'Better is little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure and trouble therewith?' Alas, my sister! it was better for thee in bonds at Aleppo, than in palaces at Corinth! Yea, to bring back what thou didst seem outwardly to me that day—the Lord only knoweth how thine heart stood toward Him—my sister, I would give my blood, mine own life—all I can give

thee now. Alas, alas! what shall I say to thee? what shall I do for thee? how may I be comforted for thee, my poor Irene!"

Irene had not uttered a word during the whole of Sophronia's expostulation. To Victor's reasoning she could oppose reasoning; but what had she to oppose to this unreasoning, tender, mournful love, which yearned over her, stray sheep that she was, as a mother might yearn over a lost child? But when Sophronia ceased speaking, and the dead silence of midnight, which had been broken only by her voice, closed round them again, Irene spoke at length, in very different tones from before.

"My dearest Sófia!" she said tenderly. "Thou must not grieve in this way over me, my dove! I am not worth it. I know well I was not once thus. Let it pass—it has gone by. Berenice will meet Sophronia in her snowy robe, and she can tell her not to look out for Irene!—if there be any other world after this"—she added in a lower tone.

"Dost thou doubt it?"

"At times I do," replied Irene in a low voice.

"Only at times, Irene? Ah! is there no ray of light, however faint and dim, within thy soul? Dost thou believe in the God of Israel? I ask not thy prudence, thy wisdom, thy intellect: I ask it of thy heart."

"Thou art hard on me, Sófia! But if I must needs reply from my soul,—I think I do."

She spoke hesitatingly, as if she scarcely felt sure of her own convictions.

"And dost thou believe on the Son of God?"

Irene gave no answer.

Sophronia knelt for a moment in the same position, her head uplifted, and her eyes unusually bright, gazing earnestly in her sister's face: then, as the ominous silence continued, her head sank down, and a half-smothered sob caught Irene's ear.

"Grieve not for me, my dove!" she said tenderly. "If thy faith be true, it will avail thee in the end. But for me—how could I do otherwise? Coriander hates the very name of a Christian."

"Didst thou love him, then, so dearly, that thou gavest thy soul for him?"

"Love him?" answered Irene in a peculiar tone. "There was not much of that, I think. He bought me in my bonds, and set me free, and wedded me—made me the mistress of his stately mansions and the sharer of his luxury and wealth. I consider myself bound, in common gratitude, to regard his wishes, and to secure his comfort to the best of my power. But for love—nay, Sófia, there was but little of that."

"What was it, then, which my sister Irene loved, better than she loved her own soul and the glory of the Lord?"

"Can I tell thee, Sófia, when I scarcely know it myself? Perhaps it was power, and grandeur, and luxury—ease and leisure, liberty and brightness, fair robes, costly gems—were these worth nothing?"

"Were they worth the price thou gavest? Were they so precious that for them thou shouldst give that precious thing, thy soul? Is there peace, Irene, in thine heart? Say, art thou at rest?"

Irene shook her head.

"Ah, no! Peace is the gift of the Lord Christ alone. How canst *thou* have peace, who art wandering on the mountains, a lost sheep, far from the fold? Ah, poor lost one, art thou weary with thy wandering? Thou who art gone so far, comes there never even yet to thine ear the voice of the Shepherd, counting the flock in the valley below? O not too far—not too far, beloved, for the Shepherd to seek for thee!"

Sophronia spoke rather incoherently, and her voice was broken by sobs; but Irene comprehended all that she meant. She did not answer; she lay still, her arms thrown round her sister; and after a pause, Sophronia spoke again.

"My poor sister, my own Irene, thou hast sinned deeply—only God knoweth how deeply. But I will not give thee up—I will not believe that thou hast sinned unto death. And shall He love thee less than I, who loveth unto the end them for whom He died? When He counteth His flock for the fold immortal, shall any one of them be found wanting?"

"'The son of perdition!'" said Irene under her breath.

"He was never one of the flock;" answered Sophronia quickly. "And among all those twelve, beloved, and those

seventy—yea, adding the five hundred who believed by the power of the Paraclete—we heard but of one who was the son of perdition."

"But the—" Irene stopped herself.

"Speak, beloved."

"I was only thinking," she said in a hopeless tone, "that the addition of the five hundred made it but the worse for the *one!*"

"Thou art not that one, Irene."

"How canst thou know that, Sófia?"

"Hath not the Lord Christ said, 'Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you'?"

"Not that!"

"'Whatsoever'!"

"There must be exceptions."

"'Whatsoever'!" reiterated Sophronia. "I will ask Him, Irene, who is not willing that any son or daughter of Israel should die. I will 'give Him no rest' till He have heard me; and I will plead before Him His own promise—His potent 'whatsoever.' It is His word, not mine. He must have known what He said: He must have meant what He said."

Irene did not answer.

"In His hands I leave thee," added Sophronia. "Sleep, beloved sister."

Disengaging herself from Irene's clasp with a parting kiss, she took up her lamp, and glided noiselessly from the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

FURTHER REVELATIONS.

"The inward depths of that deceitful fount
Where many a sin lies sleeping, but not dead."

CAMILLA had awoke suddenly, how she knew not, with a vague impression that Sophronia had quitted her chamber, and she was left alone. She uttered her name, and received no reply. It was a close, warm night, and Camilla remained awake and restless, until, nearly an hour afterwards, she saw a dim light approaching. Its bearer extinguished it just before she entered: and only a gentle rustling sound, barely audible, warned Sophronia's mistress of her return.

"Sophronia!" she said, softly.

"Domina!" was the response as usual.

"Where have you been all this time?"

"Has the Domina missed me?" answered Sophronia evasively.

"I have not wanted you, if you mean that; but I discovered your absence some time ago."

Sophronia sat down on her bed, and drew a deep sigh. "The Domina had better sleep till the morning, before I tell my story; it may be that she will not sleep much after."

"Nay, Sophronia, let me rather hear it at once."

"Remembers the Domina that I told her long since, that when Jerusalem our city fell, my sister and I were sold into bondage?"

"Not many weeks since, Sophronia: but truly it seems more like years to me. Yes, I remember. Well?"

"And the Domina asked me, if I knew what had befallen my sister? And I said, In no wise."

"You did."

"Domina, I have found her."

"Found her! In Corinth? Is she among the slaves of the Lady Irene?"

"She is in this house."

"Why, Sophronia, what a strange coincidence! What a joyful meeting you must have had!"

A sigh which was half a sob, broke from Sophronia.

"Strange, indeed!—stranger than the Domina has guessed yet. But alas! our meeting was no joyous one."

"Why, Sophronia? Is your sister ill, or unkindly used? Surely the Lady Irene would not use her slaves cruelly?"

"Not ill; not ill-used. Domina, she is no slave. The Lord Christ look, in His great mercy, and not from the throne of His judgment, on her who hath sold her soul for gold, hath bartered for costly robes the life of ages, hath weighed against precious stones the precious blood wherewith she was ransomed. The Lord have mercy upon her! Domina, my sister, who was sold into slavery with me—my sister Irene, the daughter of Alexander and Berenice—"

"Sophronia!" cried Camilla, sitting up in her bed. "You cannot mean—you could never dream—"

"She is your friend, Domina—the Lady Irene herself."

"Impossible!"

"Alas, my mistress! Until this day I trusted that it was not so—I fought against the conviction which was coming upon me. But the ornament of her bracelet, like that I once had myself—and the knowledge of the faith, which she could not conceal, though she tried hard to do so! And this even, resolved to know the truth at all cost, and to secure a quiet hour while her lord was absent—this night I went to her. I spake to her in the language which we lisped in our childhood on the hills of Judæa—I called her by her name, and the name of our mother, Irene, daughter of Berenice: and though indeed

she was startled, she denied not her blood. She knew me."

"And how came she hither?"

Sophronia spread out her hands with a despairing gesture.

"What know I, or what care I? I asked no such questions. What she is, and to what she has come—ah me, unhappy! Oh, had I found her in the sorest bondage—had I found her in chains and in prison, for the name of the Lord Christ,—had I heard of her death by the lions, or in the fire, for His sake,—verily I had knelt and sung unto His name a psalm of thanksgiving, a pæan of triumph. But *this*—! 'Be merciful unto her, be merciful unto her, O God, for my soul trusteth in Thee, and under the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge, until this calamity be overpast!'"

"Unhappy Sophronia!"

"Unhappier Irene! Am I unhappy who have Christ, my Lord, ever loving me, ever helping me, ever guiding me? But she—she hath no guide—no helper,—no love. If riches were for mine advantage, He could give them me in a day. But hers are of the Evil One, since for them she gave up Christ; and if her riches make to themselves wings and fly away, for what then, O my sister, wilt thou have bartered thy soul?"

And Sophronia threw herself on the bed, sobbing violently. Camilla attempted to offer no consolation; she felt that this was a sorrow beyond the reach of any comfort from her. She only said after a time, when Sophronia's sobs grew a little quieter.

"Sophronia, shall we pray together for Irene?"

Sophronia looked up.

"Together, Domina!—and to whom?"

"To your God," said Camilla simply.

"Domina! Will you pray to the Lord Christ?"

"I will never pray again to any other."

Sophronia burst into tears.

"O my God!" she said amidst her sobs, "wilt Thou give me for my hire this beloved soul? But not instead—O Father not instead of that for which I have asked Thee!"

"Pray thou, Sophronia, for I know not what to say."

Camilla rose from her bed, and throwing a palla round her, in the dim dawn of the autumn morning. the two girls stood together, Sophronia praying audibly, Camilla following in silence, for the soul of Irene.

When Camilla came the next morning into the peristyle, she found that Strophius and Coriander had just returned from the city. Irene was not there, nor was Victor; but to her sister's surprise, Marcia had already risen, and was standing wrapped in a light palla. conversing with Strophius, who at that moment was the only occupant of the room beyond herself. The instant they perceived Camilla, Marcia quickly turned towards her, while Strophius, as if trying to detain her, asked, "Then I may consider it settled?"

"Certainly," answered Marcia, advancing to meet her sister. "Good-morning, Camilla."

"Good morning, dear Marcia. I presume you feel better, since you have risen so early."

"Oh yes, much better now," replied Marcia, in a hurried tone, as if she were afraid of having been overheard, and wished to efface the remembrance of it. "I think Dionysius' drugs have done me good. Where is the Lady Irene?"

Camilla replied that she did not know, and inwardly wondered whether Irene would choose to acknowledge Sophronia in public. Victor soon entered, and shortly after him Coriander, who, looking round, immediately inquired, "Where is my wife? Has she not appeared, ladies? I hope she is not ill. Irene!" and going to the curtain, he called again for her.

"In a moment," responded the voice of Irene from a distant apartment. "If the young ladies are there, pray excuse me to them—I will be with you directly."

Coriander accordingly returned to the sisters, and was doing his best to entertain them himself—Strophius being absorbed by a volume of poetry which he carried at his girdle—when, in a few minutes, Irene entered. She was not alone. She led in by the hand a lady in Grecian costume, but wearing no ornaments, whom she presented to the group, saying, "My sister, the Lady Sophronia."

So entirely had the change of costume altered the appearance

of Sophronia, that for a moment even Marcia did not recognise her. Camilla of course understood what was passing.

"Thy sister, Irene!" said Coriander. "I knew not thou hadst a sister. Speak, where didst thou find her?"

"Camilla!" whispered Marcia to her sister in accents of unutterable surprise; "is this Sophronia? Your slave-girl the Lady Irene's sister!"

"That question," replied Irene to Coriander, "will be best answered by the Lady Camilla. I must entreat her pardon for depriving her of her attendant, but she has only to name the price she requires for my sister, and I will pay it to the last mite."

Camilla had made sufficient progress in Greek to understand the scope of what Irene was saying; while Marcia, in extreme curiosity to make out the scene, had turned to Strophius, and requested him to act as interpreter. Victor entered at this juncture: but, though nobody was sufficiently disengaged to notice it, it might have been perceived that his countenance exhibited no particular surprise.

"Pray say no word about price, Lady Irene," said Camilla. "I give dear Sophronia her freedom with the greatest pleasure, only asking that she will never cease to be my friend; and perhaps you will kindly allow one of your maidens to give me such slight attendance as I require while I have the honour to be your guest."

"You will permit me at least to present you with one," answered Irene; while Sophronia turned and offered to kiss Camilla's robe. The latter prevented this humiliation by giving her an affectionate kiss: and Coriander welcomed his new sister-in-law with much cordiality. The anti-Jewish prejudices of Marcia seemed to have suddenly and entirely disappeared. She had vowed at Pompeii that Sophronia the semi-Jewish slave should never touch the hem of her palla; but to Sophronia the Greek lady, whose position had totally changed, she now offered her hand with words so flattering that the simple-minded Christian girl was sorely puzzled how to account for the alteration.

"You, too, Domina Marcia?" she said, blushing scarlet. "Have you then——"

But suddenly checking herself she suffered her hand to be

taken, while Marcia entreated her in the most flattering way to drop all titles in addressing her for the future. Marcia was a worshipper of success.

The last to congratulate the new member of the family was Victor. He spoke in his own tongue, and in a very low tone; so low, that Coriander could not hear what he said. Irene, who stood close by Sophronia, apparently heard, for she coloured, and an expression—half scorn, half sadness—passed over her face. The party took their seats, and refreshments were served round by Coriander's slaves. Irene then requested Camilla to follow her to another apartment, and select from her attendant maidens the one whom she best liked, who should become her property in the stead of Sophronia. Sophronia chose to follow, and Irene, clapping her hands, ordered the woman who answered the summons to send in all the maidens with the exception of Phyllis and Callirhoe, who were her own personal attendants. She meanwhile occupied herself in turning over some embroidery patterns; while Sophronia drew Camilla a little apart.

"Will the Domina grant me a favour?"

"Anything you please, Sophronia; but pray call me Domina no longer, or I must adopt the title to you also."

Sophronia smiled her faint melancholy smile, and answered, "Then, sweet Camilla, if so I may name you,—know that among Irene's maidens there is one, a young sister in the faith, whom I beg you to choose if you feel no other preference. It is true that she is very young and inexperienced, but for that very cause, and since she is shrinking and timid, I would fain see her in your kind care. I know for myself," she concluded with a smile, "how kind it is."

Camilla echoed the smile. "Certainly I will choose her."

"I thank you. Her name is Euphrosyne."

The girls had entered the room and were ranging themselves round the walls of the atrium at a signal from Irene, who put down her designs upon a silver table, and approaching the middle of the room, lifted her hand to command silence.

"Slaves! you behold in this lady, on whom hitherto you have looked as one of yourselves, my own sister, the Lady

Sophronia. Not having met since we were almost children, we did not immediately recognise each other. We have now done so: henceforth she is one of your master's family. You will serve her as myself. But she will select one of you as her personal attendant, and I shall present another to the Lady Camilla Parata. Be obedient and docile to your new mistresses, you who may be honoured by the selection.—Ladies, will you take your choice?"

"Shall I still choose Euphrosyne, or leave her for you?" whispered Camilla.

"Will you leave her to me, unless you prefer her?" answered Sophronia in the same tone.

"Which is she?"

"The young girl nearest the curtain, on the right hand of the second pillar."

"Take her first, and then I will choose."

Sophronia, slightly advancing, made a sign to Euphrosyne, who at once knelt and kissed her robe.

"May I choose this young girl, sister?"

"Choose whom you like best, Sófia," was Irene's answer; "but from her youth and want of instruction, Euphrosyne is among the least valuable of my maidens."

"I should prefer this one, if you will give her to me."

"Most willingly."

Camilla was looking round. She did not care for a handsome girl, nor a specially accomplished one, but she did wish to secure one who had good health and good temper. Most of the faces before her did not promise well for the latter. Some looked stolid and apathetic, some sullen and discontented, some bold and impertinent. At last her eye settled on one who had shrunk behind the rest as if ashamed or afraid of being observed, and whose downcast, reddened eyes showed some kind of trouble. The kind heart of Camilla warmed to her at once. She readily made her way through the foremost slaves, who moved aside when they saw in what direction she was coming, and went up to the shrinking figure half hidden by the porphyry pillar.

"What is your name?" she asked in her best Greek.

"Penelope, Lady," was the timid reply.

"Would you like to be chosen?"

The sorrowful eyes were lifted to Camilla's pitying face, with the strongest of affirmatives in them. Camilla looked back to Irene to inquire if her choice would be agreeable, and perceived that something had called up a deep blush to Irene's cheek, which she held one of her designs in a position to conceal.

"Is Penelope there?" she said in a rather hard tone. "Take whom you please, Lady Camilla: but I wish you joy of your choice if you select her. I had occasion a few days ago to reprove her for conduct which did not suit me, and she chose to be very impertinent. I trust that she may behave better to you than she did to me."

The expression of Irene's face was entirely at variance with her words. The former betrayed that she felt ashamed of her own conduct in the matter, and did not wish her guests to know the particulars too closely. Penelope lifted her tearful eyes with a look, half pleading, half reproachful, to Irene's face.

"Lady and mistress!" she said in a trembling voice, "indeed, indeed I did not mean to be impertinent. I could not do as you bade me, and you know the cause thereof."

"Enough, girl, enough," said Irene hastily, as though afraid of her saying more. "I dare say the Lady Camilla will be less particular with you. See that you serve her well. Are you quite satisfied?" she added to Camilla. "Have you determined on selecting Penelope?"

"If you will kindly give me leave," replied Camilla.

"With the greatest pleasure. Slaves, you can go."

The girls retired, Euphrosyne and Penelope remaining. Camilla then, after thanking Irene for her gift, desired her new possession to repair to her chamber, where she would shortly come to her and instruct her in her requirements; Sophronia did not dismiss hers, except to request her to fetch something for her. When the slaves had both departed, Irene excused herself; and on the return of Euphrosyne, Sophronia summoned her to come near, and asked her, in a low tone, what had been the offence of Penelope. Euphrosyne hesitated, as if she did not like to tell; but on Sophronia's encouraging her to proceed, she said, very low and rather hurriedly,

"Lady, Penelope is of us. The Lady commanded her to sacrifice to idols, and she could not—you know she could not!"

Sophronia clasped her hands at the base of her throat, with a semi-hysteric gesture. "My sister command her to sacrifice? Euphrosyne, are you certain? Might it not have been the Lord Coriander?"

"The Lord Coriander takes no account of us maidens. I question if he knoweth even our faces or our names. Nay, assuredly it was the Lady."

"Didst thou see and hear it?"

"Yea, Lady. She stood by the altar of Phœbus—the Lady—and she said unto Penelope, "Cast in the incense, vile dog of a Christian, or thy God shall not save thee from the torture!' And Penelope would not. She trusted in the Lord: and hath He not delivered her this day?"

It would be hard to say whether Camilla or Sophronia was more shocked by Euphrosyne's simple narrative.

"I could not have believed such a thing of the Lady Irene!" cried Camilla. "But surely the unhappy Penelope was not put to the torture?"

"Do I know?" answered Euphrosyne evasively. "She disappeared from among us six days since, and I saw her not until now. She had wept, Lady."

Sophronia dismissed Euphrosyne with a gesture. Her large dark eyes, looking larger in their dilated horror, met the eyes of Camilla, which were full of tears.

"O Camilla, is it too late? Can this poor lost sheep yet be gathered into the fold of the Lord Christ? That is not the Irene who twined garlands for my hair on the Mount of Olives! How her soul must have hardened as she has departed from the Lord! Oh, what an awful distance must her sin have stretched out between Him and her, ere she could have had the heart to do this thing! Can this poor sheep, so far strayed, indeed be sought, and bound up, and borne home?"

"It is not surely for me to teach you, dear Sophronia: yet I remember that you once told me Paulus the Apostle had at one time persecuted the Christians."

"Thanks, beloved. It is true. There is hope for my unhappy sister. And yet—ah, Camilla! he was never a persecutor after he had been called a Christian!—Lord, Thou knowest all things! Hast Thou not died for us all?"

CHAPTER IX.

PEARLS AND TEARS.

"Canst be idle?—canst thou play,
Foolish soul who sinned to-day?"
—GEORGE HERBERT.

"WHAT are your future intentions, Domine?

The speaker was Strophius, and the person addressed was Victor. Marcia, Camilla, and Sophronia were also present.

"A question which I was about to ask you," was the reply.

"Well, I mean to go to Rome by the first ship that I can hear of, bound in that direction."

"And I hope to settle in Corinth. My good friend Coriander has kindly offered to advance me the sum of money which I have lost, that I may trade with it, and repay him when I can. He offered me, indeed, more: but I cannot accept a greater sum than I may reasonably hope soon to refund."

Strophius shrugged his shoulders, apparently in contempt of Victor's scruples.

"And what do the ladies mean to do?" inquired the latter.

Marcia hesitated, and coloured slightly. Camilla, after waiting a moment for her sister to speak, replied that she had scarcely been able to decide on her future course. That she must earn her own living in some way was certain; but she was ignorant of all arts except those of spinning, embroidering, and painting; the last, indeed, she thought she could do tolerably well. Would Victor kindly give her his advice on the subject?

"If you really can paint well, and feel disposed to try paint-

ing," replied he, "I think you scarcely could do better. There is always room in Corinth for the followers of the arts."

"Thanks for your advice: but I am so unfortunate as to have no money."

"Let me ask Coriander to find you some. I am sure he would."

"I am very much obliged to you; but—"

"Will you leave that to me, sweet friend?" said the gentle voice of Sophronia.

Camilla smiled, and thanked her.

"And Domina Sophronia?" pursued Victor, without looking at her.

A faint colour flushed her generally white cheek. "Let the Lord dispose of me," she said, bending down her head.

"Marcia, what are you going to do?" said Camilla, turning to her sister.

Instead of replying to the question, Marcia rose, saying, "Come with me, Camilla." She led the way to her own bed-chamber, ordering Flora, who was found there, out of the way, and seating herself on the low divan-like couch, motioned Camilla to do the same.

"You ask my intentions?" said Marcia, playing nervously with her bracelet. "I may as well tell you at once that Dominus Strophius has made me an offer of marriage."

Camilla's thoughts, after the first sensation of surprise—for she had never noticed that Strophius and Marcia appeared to have any attraction for each other—fled back to that dread evening at Pompeii, when Marcia had first seen Strophius, and had pronounced him neither tall nor handsome, and not at all her idea of an author.

"Why, Marcia, how long have you known him?" was her answer.

"Not long, certainly," said Marcia, continuing to clasp and unclasp the bracelet; "but one comes to know people quickly in such circumstances as these: and—well, we must live somehow, and I—I think it is much better to have a husband to work for you, than be obliged to work for yourself. I don't

Camilla was therefore greatly relieved when she heard the sweet low voice of Sophronia in the ante-chamber, and a moment afterwards the curtain was drawn aside, and she appeared.—*Page* 95.

like work at any time; and people look down so on a woman who works!"

Camilla's ideas on the subject of work, and yet more of matrimony, were so entirely different from these, that almost before she knew it, she had come bluntly out with—

"That depends on the husband."

"Any husband is better than none!" said Marcia sharply. "And what have you to say against him, pray?"

"O Marcia!" was Camilla's answer to the first sentiment in her sister's speech. Then she added, to the question,—"Oh! nothing—nothing, so far as you are concerned. He is not the man whom I should have married, that is all."

"Well, I am not asking you to marry him!" retorted Marcia.

"Any arrangement which secures your happiness and comfort, dear Marcia, will be welcome to me. Then I suppose you think of going with him to Rome?"

"Yes, I suppose I shall. Indeed, I should not like to live in Corinth. One would have to learn Greek, and their manners are so different from ours."

"I do not object to either of those," said Camilla, and I must confess I should not like to leave Corinth."

Had Camilla confessed the real truth, it would have taken the shape of "I should not like to leave Sophronia."

"Please yourself about that," said Marcia very unconcernedly. "I must say I think you would do much better if you came with us to Rome. Nobody knows you here."

"And who knows me at Rome?"

"Well, you might get friends there sooner than here; and I should think you would find it easier to marry."

Camilla fairly laughed. "Do you want everybody else to marry as well as yourself?" she said. "Thank you, I am in no hurry about that. I am much more anxious to secure customers for my paintings."

"I dare say you may do that better here," coolly responded Marcia. "Shall we go down?"

When Camilla came to think over her prospects—which she did that night instead of going to sleep—she felt that they were not encouraging.

She well knew that she could not expect the company of Sophronia in her new home; and how could she make any new home for herself? For a young unmarried woman to live alone was scarcely consonant with Roman ideas of propriety, and Camilla shrewdly guessed that with Greek ones it would be even more incompatible. And apart from that, how was she to sell her paintings, without either father or brother to face the world on her behalf? The notion of marrying for a home was utterly repugnant to her: and had this not been the case, nobody wanted to marry her. What could she do but resign her vision of painting and Corinth, and go to Rome with Marcia and Strophius? Yet that involved giving up Sophronia: and suddenly another thought struck cold on Camilla's heart. It involved also giving up Christ. She would hear no more of that story of Jesus and the resurrection, which alone had ever brought hope and peace to her soul. And words came to her which she had heard from Sophronia,—"He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." Yet how could she decide to stay in Corinth? The matter seemed taken out of her hands.

Penelope was fast asleep on the couch beside her. Camilla sat up in the bed, and, her heart beating fast at the strange new thing she was doing, spoke to this unknown God.

"Lord Christ!" she said. "If I address Thee not rightly, I humbly deprecate Thy wrath, for I am but an ignorant Latin maiden, and I know not properly by what ceremonies Thou requirest to be propitiated. But I have heard that Thou art a great God, and that Thou wilt have compassion upon men. If this be true, grant me Thy favour; and I pray Thee so to order the course of my destiny, so far as Thou hast power over it, that I may be able to remain in Corinth, and to hear more about Thee. I desire to be one of Thy votaries, if Thou wilt accept of me, and if I can learn how to obtain merit in Thy sight. If I go to dwell in Rome, this will be impossible to me. Grant, therefore, I entreat Thee, that I may remain in Corinth. And if Thou wilt do this, then I shall know that Thou hearest prayer."

Camilla felt instinctively, as she lay down again, that Sophronia would have used very different words: but then Sophronia could have been bringing her petitions to a Friend, and she

was speaking to a Stranger. Until she came to pray, she had imagined that she knew a good deal about this new religion. But now, in a moment, all her knowledge appeared to desert her. It was no longer a question of acquaintance with doctrines or opinions: she came face to face with a Person, and she was doubtful of His disposition towards her. He did not know her, and Sophronia was not there to speak for her!

Camilla lay awake for a short time longer, but she meditated no further upon her own prospects. Her thoughts were occupied with this fresh venture which she had made—with this new Divinity into whose hands she had put her cause. She did not recognise as yet that there was no God but Him. He was to her the God of the Jews, and also One who, as some thought, entertained some kindly feelings towards Gentiles. But whether the particular Gentile maiden who had taken the liberty of requesting His help that night would have any chance of obtaining it—that was a doubtful point, and a mystery of the future.

Not quite fifty years before, a Voice had said in the courts of the Temple of Jerusalem, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink," and, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." And this night at Corinth came that Roman girl, trembling at her own act, to see if the perennial Fountain had any water to spare for her parched lips, and whether He who had been lifted up on the cross of shame was willing to receive her. Very ignorantly she offered her request—as ignorantly as he who prefaced his with "if Thou canst do anything"—and he was not sent empty away.

Camilla slept so late, after her restless night, that Penelope was seriously concerned about her lady's somnolence in the morning. At length, after much waiting and uneasy reflection, the slave dexterously contrived to throw down the brazen mirror, the noise of whose fall made Camilla start up in dismay, to see Penelope, with eyes lowered and hands crossed on her bosom, deprecating her anger.

"Is it late, Penelope?" she asked in ungrammatical Greek. "Have I slept too long?"

"The gracious Lady has slept until a late hour," answered

Penelope, whose servility was in marked contrast to the quiet dignity which had always characterised Sophronia.

Camilla hastily left her bed and began to dress, with an uneasy mind, which had two inspiring causes. The lateness of the hour was the smaller of these. The other was a religious difficulty. Her prayer in the night had been altogether so strange an experience, that the minor items connected with it had not much concerned her; and now, accustomed as she was to the idea of gods whose favour the slightest neglect of ritual observance would forfeit, she was troubled to remember that she had not risen and knelt before offering her prayer—that she might thus have brought a curse upon herself, and not a blessing. Sophronia must be consulted on this point as soon as possible, and asked what kind of propitiation would be necessary to appease the offended Deity. Camilla was therefore greatly relieved when, while she was still dressing her hair, she heard the sweet low voice of Sophronia in the antechamber, and a moment afterwards the curtain was drawn aside, and she appeared.

"The Lord keep thee, sweet Camilla!" was her greeting.

"I have so much to say to thee, dear Sophronia," answered Camilla, eager to ascertain the truth on the point that troubled her mind, and speaking in Latin, that Penelope might not understand her. "Tell me, first, whether I have committed a trespass against your religion? I desired to obtain favour of the Lord Christ, whom you worship, and I prayed to Him in the night: but I was thinking so much of what I had to say that I omitted to rise and kneel; I only sat up in bed. Will He be very angry, and what must I offer to obtain forgiveness?"

Sophronia smiled. "Dear Camilla, He will not be angry at all. 'Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.' It is well, doubtless, that the body also should be bowed in reverence before Him who hath made heaven and earth: but if there be an omission of this, whether from physical incapacity or from preoccupation of mind, He who healed the paralytic brought on his bed will not refuse thee a hearing. Surely it were better to pray and not kneel, than to kneel and not pray!"

"Then I need not offer any sacrifice?"

"What sacrifice canst thou offer? He is the Sacrifice, offered once for all, never to be repeated any more. 'For by one offering He hath perfected in perpetuity the hallowed ones.'"

"Do I not, then, even need that thou shouldst intercede for me?"

"We may all pray one for another. But thou canst not want an intercessor with Christ the Advocate."

"That is all right, then, and my mind is relieved. And now, Sophronia, I have something to tell thee. Art thou prepared for a surprise?"

Sophronia, seating herself on the couch, intimated her readiness to be surprised.

"My sister tells me—canst thou guess what?"

"That she is about to marry Dominus Strophius," replied Sophronia, smiling, and not looking surprised at all.

"Why, Sophronia!—who told thee?"

"I guessed that some days ago."

"Thou art a better guesser than I," returned Camilla, binding up the last plait.

"Perhaps I could tell thee something else which thou hast not guessed."

Camilla looked a query.

"Suppose I were to say the same thing of myself?"

"Art thou going to marry? Oh, I know—it is Dominus Victor. I can guess things sometimes, thou seest. Dear Sophronia, I am glad for thee; I think thou wilt be happy."

Sophronia blushed and smiled an affirmative to the guess.

"Thou knowest," she said, "I could not have continued to dwell with Irene and Coriander, seeing they are not of the faith. But I saw not the path clear before me; I had much searching of heart, and I laid the matter many times before the Lord. Therefore—partly—I was rejoiced when Coriander told me yesterday that Victor had spoken to him, and my way was at once made plain. And now, sweet Camilla, I am come to ask a kindness at thy hands."

"Take it, dear Sophronia. Wouldst thou have me broider thy bridal robe?"

"No, truly. I would have thee come and dwell with me."

"Dearest, I should be terribly in the way!"

"Not in the least. Grant me the boon I ask."

The news of the engagement between Victor and Sophronia was received with great satisfaction by all persons concerned but one. The dissentient was Irene. She had set her heart upon marrying Sophronia to some far grander and wealthier man than Victor, and was both disappointed and annoyed. For a few hours, therefore, she was cross and argumentative; but finding that she could not shake Sophronia's resolve, she soon laid aside her opposition, accepted the fact, and entered into the scheme as ardently as she had previously opposed it. Coriander had some house property in Corinth, and he offered one of his best houses as his wedding gift. Irene was ready to load Sophronia with gems and gold from her stores, had not the offer been firmly though lovingly refused. She came into the peristyle with her hands full of glittering things—elastic golden armlets, rich fibulæ, gold and silver chains, pearl necklaces, golden girdle-clasps, and other trinkets,—followed by two slaves, burdened like herself with jewellery. Irene threw them down on one of the soft mattresses in the recesses of the chamber, and then, seating herself on the corner of the mattress, said lightly,—

"Now, Sófia, come and choose."

"Choose what, Irene?" asked Sophronia, lifting her eyes from the embroidery on which she was occupied at the other end of the peristyle.

"Whatever thou wilt of these," said Irene, pulling out of the rich heap a jewelled fan, and calling to Callirhoe to come and fan her.

Sophronia rose and came to her sister. Casting her quiet eyes over the magnificent articles which lay in splendid confusion on the Thessalonian mattress, she simply said,—

"My dear Irene! what could I do with these?"

"Wear them, of course," replied Irene, whose own attire indicated that she practised as well as taught. "Thou wouldst look lovely in that pearl necklace, and these golden armlets are the very thing for thee. Are they not, Camilla? Come and look."

Camilla admired them greatly, and quite agreed with Irene. Sophronia had taken into her hand one of the costly golden armlets, and was softly feeling the weight and elasticity of the gold. At length she said,—

"What is the value of this, Sister?"

"Really, I don't know," answered Irene carelessly. "Forty or fifty minæ, I dare say—sixty, perhaps. I have not an idea."

"Sixty minæ!" repeated Sophronia gravely. "And I was sold to the Domina Aurelia for about seven, and to Calphurnius the slave-dealer, when no man would buy us, for not so much as one. And—" she added, drooping her head lower over the gold, "for thirty poor drachmæ, my sister, *He* was sold to the priests and the elders. Is the disciple so much above the Lord? Nay, truly, my sister, I am worth less than this. Take them back, I pray thee, with much love for thy good will."

Camilla watched Irene's face as Sophronia was speaking. She had blushed painfully when her sister alluded to her former low condition, and had apparently felt that she was thus unpleasantly reminded of her own. But as soon as Sophronia uttered the words "thirty drachmæ," Irene, as if she knew what was coming, testily bade the slave cease fanning her, and began to busy herself with some of the trinkets on the mattress, as if to give herself an opportunity to hide her face.

"Here, maids," said Irene, when Sophronia ceased, speaking quickly as if she were anxious to banish some disagreeable recollection, "carry back the gems to the closet. The Lady Sophronia will not have these. I will see that she has others and finer ones. And, ladies," she pursued, drowning her sister's attempt to remonstrate, "I must ask your kind pardon. Coriander always demands my attendance at this time."

And Irene quickly disappeared, the entrance of Victor immediately following her retreat. Camilla tried in vain to call to mind a single previous occasion on which Coriander had summoned Irene at the hour in question.

"Unhappy sister!" said Sophronia with a faltering voice, as she saw Irene vanish from sight. "Is the Lord striving with her? I know, I know she has not forgotten the teaching of our mother in the true way. Poor blind sheep, lost upon the

mountains, knowing that every step takes her further from the fold, yet never turning to go back! Nay, how can she go back? We can but plead with the Shepherd to go and search for her."

"And the Shepherd has told us," said Victor, "that if we ask, it shall be given. 'He goeth after that which was lost, until He find it.'"

"Aye: and yet, the last time that ever my mother beheld James the Bishop, our Lord's brother, she heard him speak words to the disciples, whereof she told me, and one sentence thereof burned into my soul, and remained with me unto this day. 'There is a sin which hath never forgiveness.'"

Her voice sank to an awed whisper.

"But do you know that this is the sin, dear Sophronia?"

"Thanks, Camilla. No, I do not know. What that sin is, is in the counsel of God, and maybe in the conscience and the soul of him who sinneth it."

"And so long as we do not know, have we not warrant for prayer?" asked Victor.

"Yes, I think so," said Sophronia thoughtfully. "'The Lord's ear is not heavy that it cannot hear; nor His arm shortened, that it cannot save.' O how many times have I prayed Him to save that poor soul, even though it be by the whirlwind and the fire!"

"Sophronia, you began once to tell me your history, and you never finished it."

"I know, beloved. Wouldst thou hear the rest?"

"If it would not pain you to tell it."

"Not in the least. It is well for us to look back at times over all the way which the Lord hath led us through the wilderness. I am not sure that I remember precisely where I broke off, but I think I was telling thee of the attendance of my father upon the preaching of Paulus the Apostle of the Lord, who was put to death by Nero Cæsar some twelve or thirteen years ago."

CHAPTER X.

CAST ON THE WORLD.

"For when the heart of man shuts out,
Straightway the heart of God takes in."
—JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

NOT once only, but many times, did my father go to hear the words of Paulus. He did not become a disciple, even in heart, until a long while had elapsed: for the words of the Apostle were strange to him, and his heart rebelled against them. Moreover, being a Jew, the old dispensation was very dear to his heart, and he was loth to believe that the coming of the Saviour could put an end to the rites and ceremonies of the law given by Moses. Long and closely he pondered over these things. When he returned to Jerusalem, he talked them over with a few friends whom he could safely trust; and my mother had her part therein, for my father set a value on her judgment beyond what men commonly do to women. But I believe she was even longer in receiving the truth than he. It was not until I was a maiden of twelve years that my parents dared to confess the Christ, and with their children received the washing of water at the hands of the Bishop. And that was not till the city had entered into sore tumult and suffering. Ah, sweet sister! how little canst thou picture the misery of that dreadful siege, whereof the Lord said that then should be great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the age, nor ever should be again!

Sophronia paused, and buried her face in her hands with a shudder.

"I remember little of it," she continued. "I was but a maid of thirteen years when it terminated, and the recollection is to me as the recollection of a frightful dream. But I cannot but

remember how day after day, the food and water grew more and more scarce and coarse, and Irene and I wondered much to see it. For a time we bore it in silence, but at length we spake to our mother. But when she heard us she wept, and said, 'Alas, my daughters! even the chief women of our nation have but scant and poor food now! Ye must bear it in peace, maidens, for there is no better to give you.' Then my two younger brethren died one by one—they were sweet little children of two and five years—and we feared that Irene would die, for she grew thin and white, and seemed as if she hungered not, even with so little to eat.—Would it have been better if she *had* died? The Lord knoweth, and I know nought.—And then, after that weary season, I marked all at once, with wonder and pain, how ill my mother was; how white and worn her face seemed, and how weak she grew day by day. Oh, what a sore time that was! Bid me not speak more in detail—she died, sweet friends, died of sheer want and sorrow, and that which shall rise of her at the last day we laid in the garden below the terrace of our house. Then, soon after, the end came."

Camilla noticed the noiseless entrance of Irene, but Sophronia, who sat with her back to the curtain, did not seem aware of it. She continued in the same low, sad tone.

"The end came at last. Our glorious Temple, our holy and beautiful House, where our fathers worshipped—whose marble floors had been trodden by the blessed feet of the Son of God Himself—was given up to the spoiler. The Roman soldiers poured in by legions, and defiled the Holy Place. They set up their idolatrous standards even in the very Sanctuary itself—the earthly dwelling-place of the Most High, whereinto once every year only the High Priest could enter, and he not without blood. And the Lord looked on, and beheld it, and He made not bare His arm, and His sword lay silent in its sheath. We had sinned, we had sinned! That night the Temple fell beneath the flames, and the fearful carnage and spoiling was begun which left of the City of God not one stone upon another. On that night our father died in the slaughter—he sleepeth in peace, and shall arise when the Voice of the Son of God shall call His own—and my sister and I were bound, with many

other youths and maidens of the city, and carried by our conquerors far away. I dare say many would think we suffered sorely in the journey. Indeed we walked a long and weary way, often footsore, and hungered, and athirst: but truly it seemed to me as if I had suffered all there was to suffer ere that journeying began. There was nothing to leave—they were all gone already—father, mother, brothers, and home—nothing to be left except Irene, and there was yet a possibility that we might be sold together. I had already borne the sorrows of my nation—the slaughter of my kinsfolk, the bitter pain of the awful sight of those terrible red flames which curled and wreathed themselves around the marble pillars of the Temple, and lit up the glorious House within. Alas! that day!"

She ceased for a moment.

"Our captors led us out of the city. There were above two thousand of us, youths and maidens, all bound together by ropes. Such clothing we had as was upon us when we were taken, and such valuables and relics of our homes as we had snatched up from the pillage, and hidden in our bosoms. For me, I had nought but a few loaves of our Jewish bread, which I concealed in my robe; and a roll of the writings of Matthew the Apostle of the Lord, which also I carried in the folds of my raiment. Moreover, I had a small token of silver-work, shaped like a fish, which is the symbol of our Christian faith; but this was discovered after a time, and taken from me by my owner. We were poorly fed, for what was the use of feeding slaves who were only to be sold for a few oboli, further than just to keep life in them? Our captors marched us down to Aleppo. There we were parted into companies, and such of us as were thought comely by the slave-dealers were better lodged and well fed for a few weeks. The rest of us were allowed to feed as before. What did it matter if we looked like skeletons? My sister was one of the favoured ones. The dealer who purchased me from the Roman captor looked on me for a short season as if he could not decide where to place me. Then he asked me if I played the cittern or the harp? I said I had no skill in music. He demanded if I could speak Latin—he himself was a Greek—and I answered that I could do so passably.

Then he desired to know if I could dress hair, or paint the face; and I said I knew nothing of these arts. Then he said, 'Alas, maid! what must I do with thee? Thou-wilt fetch little money.' And he sent me down unto the less worthy. So that night I was parted away from Irene my sister. They gave us but scant time for our farewells: and I grieved sorely at the leaving of her, for she was not twelve years old. We held each other in our arms, and both wept: and the last words that I said were—for I feared we should never meet face to face again —'God keep thee, sweet Irene, and the Saviour love thee, and the Paraclete comfort thee: and whatsoever thou mayest lose or mayest forget, mayest thou never lose nor forget Him! Keep thy garments white, and trust thou in the Holy One, who is the sure Refuge of Jacob.' And then they parted us asunder. We were all parted and carried far away—'such as were for death, to death; and such as were for the captivity, to the captivity;' and such as were for the apostacy, and the lake that drieth not, and the worm that dieth no more——"

Sophronia's voice failed her, and she covered her face with her robe and sobbed.

All the time that Sophronia continued speaking, Camilla had stealthily watched the changing features of Irene. She sat in a recess of the peristyle, behind one of the pillars, which she apparently trusted would hide her from all eyes, since she did not attempt on this occasion to disguise her feelings as usual. She had moved uneasily in her seat while Sophronia was recounting the story of the Fall of Jerusalem; but when she went on to narrate the parting with herself, Irene's head was bowed down upon her knees, and her face hidden from view in the folds of her rich robes. The moment that Sophronia ended her tale, and covered her own face, Irene rose, and slipped out of sight behind the curtains of the chamber.

"Ah, Lady Irene!" said Victor, who had been watching her along with Camilla. "She is not lost to feeling, my sister."

"How know you that?" asked Sophronia, lifting her head.

"She was here, Sophronia, though thou sawest her not," explained Camilla.

"She heard me?"

"She heard thee, and hid her face when thou wast telling the tale of your parting."

"So did she,—yea, and wept too,—a few days since, when I spake to her in the night-season: and yet since that she hath shown no sign. What matter tears, if there be no repentance?"

"The winter breaks not into spring in one day," said Victor quietly. "The Lord may be working in her soul, my sister, a work which you see not."

"It may be thus, my brother, and I have spoken foolishly. The Lord perfect that which concerneth her!"

Irene did not reappear that day until all her guests were assembled. Then she came in looking completely unconcerned, brilliant and animated as was her wont, and joined in lively converse with Marcia and Strophius. Sophronia's heart sank once more, but Camilla, who thought that much of Irene's gaiety was assumed, bade her yet be of good cheer.

The preparations for the double wedding went on with vigour. Sophronia declined Irene's offer of jewels, much to the disappointment of the latter; but she accepted at her sister's hands plain robes and household linen, merely stipulating that no bullion nor gems should be used: and Irene indemnified herself by making up in quantity what was wanting in quality. Marcia's preparations were far more splendid. She laid in robes by the dozen, and jewels by the score. Irene was delighted to furnish both, and gave herself up with double zest to the task of adorning Marcia, when she found that Sophronia refused her charming. She set her slaves to work the most elaborate embroidery upon the finest tissues, and such garments were the result of their labours as were possessed by few ladies even in luxurious Corinth. Marcia secretly congratulated herself on the sensation which her costly Grecian costume would produce in Rome, where Greek art was at a premium.

Scarfs of gold tissue were sent for to Elis, and Irene procured a large number of rich works from Athens to deck her Roman friend. As to ornaments, Marcia had only to choose the pattern of her armlets and fibulæ, and ingots of pure gold from the stores of Coriander's almost fabulous wealth, were sent to the first goldsmiths in the city for their manufacture.

Sophronia looked calmly on, neither envying nor much admiring. In common with the early Christians, she considered gems and gold as mere foolish trinkets, and the wearer of them vain and childish. They were the mark of a heathen; and what was even worse, in many cities, and in Greece particularly, they were the sign of a woman of evil reputation. It was not therefore likely that a modest Christian lady would wish to array herself in articles of such a nature. To Marcia all this was different; a heathen she was already; and her Roman eyes saw nothing objectionable in any amount of ornament. Even in Greece, too, ladies who did not care what was said about them wore gold and jewels freely, as did Irene herself. Camilla had laid hers aside, on a hint from Sophronia as to how they would be regarded.

Up to this time, Coriander had received no information concerning the religion of Victor and Sophronia. Now he must necessarily be told the truth. The parties concerned had indeed no intention of concealing the fact, and would have told him long before, had not Irene entreated that they would allow it to remain a secret. Irene well knew that to induce Sophronia to be married by a heathen priest was a sheer impossibility: on the wedding-day, therefore, at the latest, Coriander must know.

Marcia and Strophius were the first married. The bride prepared herself for the ceremony by a warm bath, a scenting of her person from head to foot, and a marvellous dressing of her hair by Irene's slaves, who wreathed strings of pearl among the plaits, and fastened them with Athenian hairpins of gold, surmounted with golden grasshoppers. Her head was finally crowned with a garland of fresh roses. She wore an amber-coloured tunic richly embroidered, a blue peplos ornamented with silver, shoes encrusted with gems, elastic armlets of pure gold, additional bracelets of rubies and Oriental torquoises, a superb necklace of ruby and pearl, a golden fibula, and ear-rings of the same precious metal. From her girdle, lavishly decorated with gold and valuable stones, hung a small silver mirror, an ivory tablet with its golden stylus, and an amber ball, used for cooling purposes. Her cheeks were delicately painted with red lead, and gold dust had been sprinkled on her hair.

Thus accoutred, the bridal party set out for the temple of

Aphrodite, the bride being borne in a litter, and accompanied by Camilla. Irene occupied another litter, but Strophius and Coriander chose to walk. After the ceremony they returned home in the same manner, excepting that the newly-married pair occupied one litter, and Irene and Camilla the other.

Coriander held a magnificent feast on the occasion of the wedding. The festivities lasted three days; Strophius and Marcia calling each other Dominus and Domina, and behaving to one another with the most polite indifference. At the close of the third day they quitted Corinth, in a vessel which proposed to winter at Rome.

"Fare thee well, my sister," said Marcia as she took leave of Camilla. "I trust thou wilt come ere long to visit us at Rome: and meanwhile I wish thee a happy residence in this abominable country, when one can't understand a word they say, and where they think it scandalous behaviour in a woman to let anybody see the tip of her nose: and mayest thou enjoy a lucrative pursuit of art, and find a rich husband, and all the blessings wherewith the gods can furnish thee!"

"Farewell, dear Marcia. I wish thee a safe journey, and all happiness."

Marcia then—by proxy, for she had never been persuaded to learn Greek—took a very flattering leave of Irene and Coriander, a much cooler one of Victor and Sophronia, and set out on her journey. Camilla, under the escort of Victor, accompanied her to the shore; and when Strophius, Marcia, and Flora, had embarked, the east wind, which was blowing strongly, bore them away, and Camilla saw them no more.

About a fortnight after the departure of Marcia, the day arrived which had been fixed for Sophronia's marriage. The latter had begged Irene to inform Coriander of her religion and that of Victor; but Irene replied very decidedly, that the wedding morning was quite soon enough to tell her husband. She evidently dreaded his anger, and expected it.

On the day appointed, the family assembled in the Hall of Chryseis:—Irene, splendidly dressed, but looking very white and excited; Camilla, also, richly attired, but without ornaments; Coriander, and Victor. They waited a few minutes for

the bride, Coriander going out meanwhile to see that the litters were ready. It had been arranged that Victor and Sophronia, with Camilla, should take immediate possession of their new house. The few minutes spent before the arrival of Sophronia were exceedingly painful to all but Coriander. She came at last, robed in pure white, and with no decoration beyond the embroidery on her robes, and one white rose in her hair. Immediately on her entrance, Coriander turned to her to say—

"I have waited thy coming, fair sister, that thou mightest tell me to which Temple I should order the litters, whether to that of the Cyprian Goddess, or of Aphrodite the Ocean-born. Victor would not tell me, and bade me ask thyself."

Sophronia advanced a few steps, till she rested her hand upon the table. A faint flush rose to her cheek, and she said in a voice which was not perfectly steady, "It is time, my brother, that thou shouldst know the truth, which I would willingly have told thee earlier. I can plight my faith in no fane wherein that worshipped is silver and gold, the work of men's hands. I am a worshipper of Him who is from the beginning, of the Living One, the Conqueror of Death, the Eternal."

"What meanest thou?" interrupted Coriander in great perplexity. "I know not of any God to whom such titles can apply, excepting Zeus the Olympian,—and in his temples it is not the custom to celebrate marriages."

"I know, my brother, of One to whom they apply far better and more truly,—the Lord God and His Son Jesus Christ."

"Sophronia! Irene!" exclaimed Coriander in indignant horror. "Can I have heard rightly? Surely, surely, Irene, thou knewest not of this!"

Victor and Camilla looked at Irene in extreme curiosity to see how she would reply to the appeal of her husband. To their astonishment, she turned her head towards them, and answered, with well-simulated surprise—

"I assure my lord that I am equally amazed with himself."

"I thought so!" exclaimed Coriander. "I knew thou couldst never have so deceived me. But thou, Sophronia, sister as thou still art, is there no means whereby thou mayest be brought to see the error of this vile superstition?"

"None," was the short, calm reply.

"I have heard before that where this strange fanaticism seizes upon any, it converts them at once into enthusiasts and fools," said Coriander, in a tone which seemed a mixture of anger, amazement, and contempt. "But I did not expect to find thee so lost to all sense of proper feeling as to embrace so degraded a belief. And you, Victor? I presume you will not think now of continuing your engagement with this wretched girl?"

"I also am a Christian, Coriander. Will you believe that it was not through any fault of mine, nor of Sophronia's, that you were not informed of this sooner."

"Are you all fools alike?" cried Coriander. "Lady Camilla, you—?"

Camilla rose. "My Lord," she said quietly, "I am a fool also, if to be a Christian is to be a fool. On that point you have your opinion: suffer me to retain mine."

"Stupendous!" exclaimed the master of the house. He walked once or twice hurriedly across the room: then he stopped before Sophronia.

"I cannot tell thee," he said, "either how utterly amazed, or how deeply grieved, this news has made me. I will not be angry with thee—thou art but a woman, and hast neither philosophy nor experience. I know thou lovest thy sister dearly: but I cannot possibly permit her to be any longer exposed to the evil influence of one who would attempt—as I have heard all of this sect do—to turn her to her own folly. Think, then, my unhappy child, that by retaining this vile fanaticism thou wilt lose thy sister. She is, I trust, untouched yet by such pernicious fancies: but I must needs forbid thee my house, and forbid her to see thee."

"My brother!" said Sophronia, raising her head, and looking earnestly into Coriander's face, "whoso loveth father or mother more than Christ, is not worthy of Him. And whoso taketh not up his cross and followeth after Him, is not worthy of Him. But he that hath left father or mother, or brethren, or sisters, or houses, or lands, for His sake and the Gospel's, shall receive an hundredfold now in this life, and in the world to come the life of ages."

She came at last, robed in pure white, and with no decoration beyond the embroidery on her robes, and one white rose in her hair.
—*Page* 107.

The expression of Coriander's eyes became more puzzled and contemptuously pitying as Sophronia proceeded.

"Why, the wretched girl must be perfectly mad!" said he. "'Life of ages!' Is that what thy God is to give thee for thy service of Him? Unhappy child! I tell thee, death is but an ageful sleep. Thou art entangled in a maze of error."

"If death be an ageful sleep, what signifies the error?" answered Sophronia. "I shall never awake, to discover it nor to regret what is lost. And if not, what then will become of thee?"

"Why, thou sayest I shall live for ever!" said Coriander, with a contemptuous laugh.

"For those who believe on the name of the Son of God, there is the life of ages; and for those who believe not, but choose to die in their sins, there is the death of ages, 'where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched.'"

"What a horrid superstition it must be!" said Coriander. "Dost thou believe that? Why, I never heard of such a harsh, narrow, sanguinary religion! Is this to be my fate because I cannot believe in the man whom ye call the Anointed One?"

"Hast thou any wish to believe?"

"No, indeed, not in such a religion as that!"

"Hast thou not then chosen for thyself the portion of the unbelievers? Doth God force thee? Thou hast spoken thine own doom, unless His great love and mercy save thee."

"'Love and mercy!' I see no love nor mercy in such a system as that."

"They are not for them that believe not. All the mercy and love of the Father is centred in His Son Jesus, and how shall they who trample Him under foot have any part therein?"

"Well, I have heard quite enough. Say no more." And Coriander turned away.

"One moment!" said Sophronia.

"Well?" said he rather testily.

"One thing thou must hear, and then I will speak no more, and I shall have delivered my soul. God speaketh this day even unto thee. Whoso forsaketh his sin, and believeth in the name of the Son of God, who offered Himself up upon the tree for us miserable sinners, shall be made partaker of everlasting

life. But for them that believe not, there remaineth nothing but the great judgment, and after that the Lake that no age can dry up, the fire that no water can put out. Thou knowest now the way of life, and between God and thee be the rest."

"Why, the notions of these fanatics are even worse than I had supposed!" said Coriander. "I knew they held some absurd unphilosophical ideas about resurrection and future life, and that they accepted as their chief prophet some malefactor who was put to death for disobeying the law: but I never imagined that they fancied their puerile superstition to be the only religion in the world, and set down all who did not lend themselves to it as worthy of punishment through all ages. It is perfectly monstrous!"

"'Nay, but who art thou that repliest against God?'" responded the low, calm voice of Sophronia, in deep contrast with Coriander's irritated tones.

"I beg that I may hear no more of this!" cried her brother-in-law. "Every word you utter shows me the absolute necessity of an immediate separation between you and your sister. I cannot have my wife contaminated with such horrible and preposterous follies!—Irene, take leave of thy sister and of the Lady Camilla, for thou wilt see them no more."

Irene was seated by the table. She rose at this summons, and the sisters clasped one another in a close embrace.

"I knew how it would be!" was the last whisper from Irene. "He has been less angry than I expected. He *hates* the Christians. Farewell, Sófia: I will yet find means to see thee."

"Not against his will," said Sophronia. "Farewell, and the Lord abide with thee, and bless thee!"

The litters had been countermanded. Coriander said that he could not think of corrupting the minds of his slaves by allowing them to bear any one to the low vicinity where the sect of the Christians performed their detestable rites: but he offered the use of them as far as the new home allotted to Sophronia. This, however, she declined: and on foot, with large pepla concealing their festal robes, Camilla and Sophronia, escorted by Victor, set forth for the little Christian church.

CHAPTER XI.

THE NEW HOME.

"How can I bereavèd be,
Since I cannot part with Thee?"
—JOHN RYLAND.

CAMILLA, said Sophronia, as they went towards the city, "thou hast confessed thy faith before men at last. Wilt thou be received as a catechumen?"

"If your priests will accept me," was the answer.

"Beloved, we have no priest but one, Christ our Lord. But His Apostles have ordained elders in every city, and the Church of Corinth is one of the oldest established in Greece. If thou wilt, I will ask Victor to speak to the elder concerning thee."

Camilla assented. A walk of rather less than an hour brought them to a quiet side-street in the city, where they entered a small house, bearing no outward dissimilarity to those on either side. The inside arrangements were soon perceived to be very different. Instead of passing through a vestibule and passage into the atrium, the passage conducted them to a small inner vestibule, cut off by a screen from the interior of the building. Victor, who appeared to be well acquainted with the place, passed behind the screen, leaving the ladies in the vestibule: and in a very few minutes a woman came to them, dressed in white, and wearing a hood upon her head.

"My sisters," she said, "I am Priscilla, one of the deaconesses of the Church. Which is it of you that hath come to be joined to yonder brother in the bands of wedlock, and which she who asks to be made ready for the washing of water unto salvation?"

"Here is the catechumen, my sister," said Sophronia, laying her hand on the shoulder of Camilla, and thus leaving Priscilla to understand that she was herself the bride. "Her name is Lælia Camilla Parata; she is of Latin birth, and of a noble family."

"'Honour to whom honour is due,'" said the Deaconess; "but here, my sister, know that we are all merely brethren and sisters. Outside the church I will call thee 'Lady.' If ye will abide here yet a few minutes, I will return to you."

The mutual love of the earliest Christians was a proverb among the heathen. The mutual love of Christians in this nineteenth century is—nay, where is it? Has the Christianity grown faint, along with the love? It is in this Church of Corinth that we hear of the first schism, which is stigmatised as "carnal" by the voice of inspiration. But it was a schism, and not a heresy: a disagreement between brethren who held the same doctrines, not an unreal and veneered unity between the votaries of Baal and the disciples of Christ. "What agreement hath the Temple of God with idols?" is asked of the same Church which was censured for the first schism.

When Priscilla returned, she requested the ladies to follow her. Having passed the wooden screen, they found themselves in a small round chamber, at one side of which was a vault, closed by an iron grating. A cupboard affixed to the wall was the only article of furniture in the room. Here stood a very old man, clad in white, with a flowing white beard. Beside him was a younger man clothed like himself, a woman habited after the manner of Priscilla, and Victor.

Priscilla led the ladies forward.

"Here, Elder, is the maiden to be wedded, and this is she who desireth instruction for the sacred washing."

"Hail, my daughters!" said the old man; and addressing Sophronia, he added, "Art thou of the Faithful?"

This query concerned her admission to full communion, for only the baptized, then as now, were eligible as communicants. During the earliest ages of the Church, all baptized persons received the communion as a matter of course, and if unable to attend church, the bread and wine were sent to them at home. Many kept the elements by them until their next meal, and

began it with them. For the strictly Apostolic practice, I refer my readers to the Scriptures themselves. In the period immediately following, corruptions began to come in; yet a great number of these grew slowly. Many points are uncertain; but what can be certainly stated with respect to the first century is as follows.

With the exception of the use of forms of prayer—more or less rigid in different Churches—the primitive celebration of Divine service and of the Sacraments appears to have greatly resembled the present custom of Nonconformist communions. The Churches of Rome and Alexandria had always the stiffest, most stringent, and most minute ritual of any. But it may generally be said that the primitive order was very much more elastic than that of the subsequent ages. It was almost free from any observance of times and seasons,—the Lord's Day was the only exception: for not only saints' days, but Christmas, Lent, and Easter, are of later origin. It had scarcely any ceremonies—the Sacraments, confirmation, marriage, and burial, exhausted the list of rites. The bishop was simply the head presbyter of each Church—*primus inter pares*—and was much in the position of a modern rector with several curates. The deaconess filled for women the same place as the deacon for men, and both were servants of the Church. Baptism took place in the round baptistery, which was a vestibule to the Church, and was performed either by immersion or suffusion,—more frequently the former,—but always by the Bishop. Until a later date than this, it was the initial rite of the Christian life. When it began to be supposed that sin after baptism was hard to be forgiven, the natural result followed—that baptism was postponed, sometimes until the very moment preceding death: thus entirely destroying its significance as the witnessing for Christ before men.

The Lord's Supper was administered four times in the week. Some churches had it on Sunday; others carefully avoided that day. It took place twice in each day, in the early morning before dawn, and again in the evening, at the usual hour of supper. In the latter case it was often preceded by the Agape, or love-feast. All present communicated, those who were not

allowed to do so, leaving the church before the rite commenced. Those who left deliberately, of choice, are the product of a later age: for in early times, persons who did not mean to communicate did not attend church at all. The bread, baked in the form of the large flat cake usual in the East, and in the Eastern half of Europe, was originally broken between two persons; but very early it became the custom for the deacon to break it, and hand it to the partaker. It was always taken in the bare hand; when the notion arose that it was too sacred to be touched, it was received first in a golden vessel, and afterwards in a napkin laid over the hand. For the priest to place it in the mouth was a much later innovation. The Sacrament was administered in both kinds. In times of persecution, some congregations substituted water for wine, to avoid betraying their hours of celebration to the heathen by the scent of the latter: but they were generally censured for doing so. The idea that it was wicked to drop a crumb of the consecrated bread seems to be one of the earliest superstitions that entered the Church. The mixing of water with the wine obtained currency from the first, but it arose, not from any doctrinal fancy, but from the fact that the ancient wines were syrups, and could be drunk only by mixture with water.

To the question put by the Elder, Sophronia and Victor both replied that they belonged to "the Faithful"—namely, they had been baptized and were regular communicants of the Church.

"Priscilla, my sister," said Stephanas the Elder, turning to the Deaconess, "take thou this maiden into safe keeping till the marriage be over. But I will first judge of her fitness for holy baptism.—Come hither, my daughter. Hast thou received any instruction in the faith?"

"None, my Lord, except from the friend beside me," answered Camilla timidly.

"Who hath taught thee rather doctrine than ceremony, methinks," said Stephanas with a smile, "else wouldst thou not call me Lord. Is it not so, daughter?"

"I burdened her not with that, Elder," replied Sophronia, echoing the smile: "indeed, I scarcely knew that the doctrine had taken so deep root as to raise a wish to be received among

us: and until it was so, there was little use in dwelling upon unimportant matters."

"Right," said the Elder, turning back to Camilla. "And now, my daughter, tell me—why desirest thou to be received into the fold of Christ our Lord?"

"Because," said Camilla, venturing to look up, and feeling reassured by the benevolent face of the Elder, "I feel wholly dissatisfied with the religion in which I have been brought up, and I want to find a God who will hear and answer prayer. I am told that Christ does this. I have prayed to Him to show me the truth, and to give me grace in your eyes, that I may be taught it, if this be the truth; and I think that He has answered me in leading me here to-day."

"Undoubtedly. Then thou believest in the name of the only-begotten Son of God?"

"I believe that He has heard my prayer; and if so, He must be divine. So far I believe. For more, I beg to be taught."

"Thou shalt be taught. What hath been thy early religion—the worship of false gods, or the philosophy of the Greeks?"

"The worship of the gods. I am not a Greek; I am a Latin."

"Thy tongue told me that," said Stephanas, smiling again. "Thou shalt be received, my daughter, as a catechumen of the Church of Corinth. Priscilla our sister will find thee where to abide for a short season, until thy friends can rejoin thee.—And now, ye who are called, and chosen, and faithful, enter ye into the House of God!"

Camilla noticed that Sophronia and the Deaconess passed out of the baptistery by a door on the right, and Stephanas, Victor and the Deacon, by one on the left; but she had no chance to see or hear more before Priscilla took her hand and led her back into the street. She was naturally timid, and beside her disappointment at not being allowed to remain and witness the marriage, she felt a little nervous, thus separated from all whom she knew, for Victor and Sophronia were practically the only friends left to her in the world. Priscilla, however, was very kind; she chatted cheerfully as she led Camilla to the house of Rhoda her niece, which was only a few doors

from the little church. Arriving there, she tapped at the door, and being bidden to enter, lifted the latch with "Peace be to this house!"

"And with thy spirit!" was the response from a pleasant-looking young woman, who sat on a bench with an infant in her arms. "Ah, Deaconess, is it thou? Thrice welcome!"

"Rhoda, I bring to thee a Roman lady who has desired to become a catechumen, that she may abide with thee during the nuptials of her friends, who are of the Faithful."

Rhoda rose from her seat, with the baby in her arms.

"Hail, Lady!" she said respectfully. "Will it please you to sit? Mine is a poorer house than I guess you are used to, but I would make you heartily welcome."

Camilla thanked her, and volunteered to hold the baby if it would be any help to her.

"Thanks, sweet Lady: it would indeed be a help to me, for I am too poor to afford a slave, and have to do all my household work alone. And household work goeth on but ill with an infant to be seen to, especially one cutting his first tooth, as this babe is—the Lord be his aid!"

Camilla took the child, and Rhoda, disappearing for a moment, returned with a large pan, which she hung over the fire burning on the hearth. She then went about other household matters, talking cheerily the while. Camilla thus incidentally learned that Rhoda's husband was a journeyman who worked under a cabinetmaker, and that wages were low at present. She was, however, happy to say that Andronicus expected to obtain some work next week in the house of one of the richest men in Corinth, who had sent down to the shop for a skilled workman to execute a piece of elaborate cabinet-making, and as her husband was acknowledged by his master to be the best of his workmen, she had hopes that he might be sent up to Coriander's house.

"Coriander!" said Camilla with a good deal of amused interest: "I know something of him. What character does he bear in the city?"

"He is a Pagan, you know, Lady," said she. "Otherwise he bears no ill name in Corinth. He has the reputation of a

rather odd man, but of a benevolent one. He has little mercy, however, for us Christians, if we cross his path; and I believe that his beautiful young wife, the Lady Irene, hath even less."

"You surprise me!" said Camilla.

"Truly, I would not speak evil of any, answered Rhoda, beginning to mix her dough: "the rather since I know only what I have heard. But I did once know a slave of hers who was a sister, and she gave me to understand as I have told you."

Rhoda seemed to fear that she had said too much, for she worked away vigorously and was silent, while Camilla sat holding the baby and thinking. She had not sat thus many minutes longer when a tap came at the door, and on Rhoda's answering invitation to enter, the latch was lifted and Victor presented himself. Camilla sprang up, remembering herself just in time not to drop the baby.

"Oh!" she said in gratified tones. "Is it over?"

"It is over," replied Victor with some amusement in his voice. "Sophronia is at home, and will be glad to see you."

The house which Coriander had bestowed on his sister-in-law stood at the corner of a neighbouring street. The door was approached by two or three steps, and from it a narrow passage led to the first peristyle, intended for the use of the male members of the family. A further door, opposite the former, gave access to the peristyle of the women. Round these peristyles, as at Pompeii, were ranged smaller apartments, some closed by curtains, some by doors. The walls were painted a pale fawn-colour, on which at intervals were delineated garlands, Tritons, &c., principally in blue. Coriander had furnished the house comfortably: but it was far larger than Victor and Sophronia required. They agreed to give up to Camilla a suite of three rooms opening into each other, which surrounded the women's peristyle; and Sophronia was to occupy as many as she needed of those on the opposite side. To Euphrosyne and Penelope were allotted rooms opening into those of their respective mistresses: but after all were provided for, there appeared sundry apartments which were needed for no purpose. These it was evident must be shut up for the present.

"Well," said Victor: "while you are settling these matters,

I will go back to Coriander, and offer to return him the money which he has lent me. I do not feel justified in keeping it, since at the time that he made the offer he was not aware of my religion. I shall also ask him to take back the house, but to have the goodness to allow us to remain here for a few days, until we can find another home. Ought I not to do this, Sophronia?"

And after a moment's thought Sophronia answered, "I think you ought, Victor." Camilla was rather dismayed at the prompt decision of her friends. But in two or three hours Victor returned, to announce that Coriander utterly refused to receive again anything that he had bestowed.

"I gave the house," he said rather loftily, "to the sister of my wife, and her Christian whim, lamentable though it is, has not changed the relationship. And I supplied the money to the son of my old friend Antonius Marcellus, which you have not ceased to be. I take not back what I give. Nay, more—I cannot forget my obligations to your father, and I do not retract my invitation to you to apply to me in any matter wherein you may need help. Come and see me—*me*—whenever you require. On one thing only I insist—that neither you, nor your wife, nor the Lady Camilla, shall make any attempt to communicate with Irene."

As Victor was passing through the peristyle on his way from the room in which Coriander had received him, he encountered the very person whose interviews with him had been so sternly proscribed. A curtain was hastily lifted, and Irene stood before him. He bowed to her, and would have passed on.

"What makes you in such a hurry?" said she. "Can't you wait a minute? I want to give you something for my sister."

"But, Irene, I have been forbidden to speak to you."

"What nonsense! Now just see—"

"But I have promised. I must not seek any interview. Farewell!"

"How horribly particular you are! What does it signify? Do wait a minute. You have not sought an interview. And I don't want you to speak to me. Listen while I speak to you. Give this to Sofia, with my love"—she was holding out a small

cylindrically-shaped parcel—"and tell her she may want it some day, if not now. Now remember, you are not to speak! Nod, to say you will give it her."

"It does not contain jewels?"

"That is not speaking, I suppose? No, it does not. And tell her—he is coming! Farewell!"

And Irene fled like a startled fawn.

"Is this wrong?" thought Victor to himself as he slipped the little packet into his bosom. "I did not seek the interview, and I could not have prevented it without positive rudeness. I do not see what I could have done."

On the packet being opened when Victor arrived at home, it proved to be a rouleau of twenty minæ.

Sophronia and Camilla now began to prosecute their work in good earnest. Camilla set to work on a life-size picture of Achilles. She was rather perplexed as to her choice of subjects, being very loth to select them from heathen mythology, and yet hardly knowing of any others, as the Roman painters drew nearly all their inspiration from this source. She at length made up her mind to choose subjects from history and life. Sophronia informed her that Greek artists in general were not so much restricted as the Roman in this particular. Her next picture, therefore, was a country farmyard; the third a garland of flowers, with fruit. On the Sunday she went with Sophronia to the little Christian church, where her friends were obliged to leave her on the outer side of the screen. She also joined the rest of the catechumens at certain times, when they received instruction from one of the Deaconesses. Camilla began to perceive that the Christian faith was something far higher, deeper, and broader than she had previously supposed. She shrank a little from the self-application imposed upon her both by the Deaconess and her own conscience. Neither could she at first comprehend the extent of God's commandments, nor admit to herself that many ideas, feelings, and practices upon which she had always looked as harmless or even laudable, were in reality positive sins. Thus Camilla learned at first slowly; but she did learn, and Sophronia very soon perceived that the work was begun—even before Camilla was assured of it herself.

CHAPTER XII.

ADMITTED TO THE FOLD.

"Thine for ever! Saviour, keep
These Thy frail and trembling sheep."

WEEKS and months passed on. Now and then one of Coriander's slaves would appear in the evening, with a string of birds, a basket of choice fruit, or a web of rare tissue, with a statement that his master was in good health, and wished his friends prosperity. But beyond this they saw and heard nothing of the inhabitants of the villa.

One evening in early spring, there came a decidedly sharp knock on the street door. This occurrence, from its extreme infrequency, always produced a little excitement in the interior of the house. Euphrosyne answered the knock, and in another moment she appeared in the ladies' peristyle to make the startling announcement—

"The gracious Lady Irene."

Behind her appeared two figures, each wrapped in a peplos. The foremost, whose peplos was of rich Tyrian purple, proved to be Irene, and the other, when unveiled, revealed the face of Phyllis.

"Irene!" cried Sophronia. "Has Coriander permitted thee, dear Sister, to come and see us?"

"What do I care for Coriander?" inquired Irene, seating herself, and throwing off her peplos. "No, of course not. But I told you I should come."

"Irene!"

"Well, what is the matter?"

"What can I say?" responded Sophronia. "I am not in the habit of saying that I do not care for my husband."

"Oh, thou!" said Irene, peevishly pulling the rich wrap from behind her, and jerking it upon the nearest bench. "No, I dare say. Thy husband is a very different type of man from mine, I can tell thee.—How does your painting progress, Camilla? Have you any purchasers yet?"

"Not yet: indeed, I am scarcely ready for one. I have only one painting quite finished, and I should like to have two or three done before I begin to look out for purchasers—if I find any."

"May I see it?"

"Certainly. Will you come into my painting-room?—but I fear my picture will not look its best by lamp-light."

The painting was the Achilles. Camilla had chosen the moment when he was seated in his tent, and the Trojan envoys were just leading Briseis away. Irene gazed at the picture in silence. At length she said, in her pleasantest manner,—

"It is a very fine picture, Camilla. I should think you need not fear difficulty in meeting with a purchaser."

The ladies returned to the peristyle, and Irene folded her peplos round her and over her head, as a preparation for departure.

"Now, Sophronia, art thou well? Dost thou want anything?"

"I am quite well, dear Sister, and I need nothing."

"I am sorry for that."

"Irene, what canst thou say to Coriander?"

"Why should I say anything? He does not know I am out of the house."

"Suppose he ask where thou hast been this last hour?"

"He never does," said Irene with a laugh. "But if he were to do, I should easily find an answer. I have been walking in the garden by moonlight—looking over my jewels—designing new patterns. I will say this for my lord,—he is the easiest man in the world to cheat."

"Irene, what meanest thou?—wouldst thou lie to thine husband?"

"Lie!—what if I do? Am I not living a lie, every hour that I breathe? What signifies a lie spoken more or less, to one whose whole life is one lie? Farewell! Let me go. Phyllis!"

Phyllis, who had been chatting to Penelope, presented herself with a lamp, and in another moment Irene was gone.

Two events occurred in the course of the following summer. The first was the birth of an infant daughter to Victor and Sophronia. To Camilla, scarcely less than to its mother, the baby was a source of never-ending delight. Whether awake or asleep, laughing or crying, doubling its tiny fists at nothing, or gazing at the same object with grave wide-open black eyes —in all attitudes it presented an admirable model. Sophronia did, indeed, suggest a doubt as to whether the human form was an allowable object for painting. But on this subject Camilla could not see with the eyes of her friend, and she maintained that what was forbidden by the Second Commandment was manifestly the painting or carving of objects for worship. Victor, to whose decision as umpire both ladies appealed, did not give a very conclusive answer. His Christian education drew him in one direction, and the natural sympathies of his Greek feeling in another. He admitted that certainly some Christians were of opinion that painting the human figure was unlawful; but this was by no means the case with all: and he reminded his wife that if the Second Commandment were held to forbid the delineation of man for other objects beside worship, it must necessarily be considered to preclude all painting of any thing: since even a rose or a peach was something in earth beneath. In this Sophronia acquiesced, but still did not seem convinced on the debated point. Camilla, however, gathering from Victor's reply that he at any rate did not consider it wrong to paint the baby, resumed her brush with an easy conscience. The prenomen to be bestowed on the infant was considerably canvassed. Sophronia was divided between Berenice and Theodora; Victor said little, but in his heart he wished the child to receive the name of his Grecian mother, Aglaia. As soon as Sophronia guessed this, she waived her own predilections, and

requested that this name might be selected. So Aglaia Marcella became the infant's name: and at least a dozen portraits of it, in varying attitudes, decorated the walls of Camilla's painting-room.

The second event was the baptism of Camilla herself. She had been a catechumen for some months before she was received among the hearers, and transferred thence after a short time into the order of Consistents, who were admitted behind the screen with the Faithful, but were not yet allowed to participate in either of the Sacraments. At the end of a few weeks more, Stephanas pronounced her fit for baptism.

The candidates for baptism on this occasion were about twelve in number. They were ranged along one side of the baptistery, in the presence of the Faithful, with their faces to the west, and were commanded by the Bishop, who fronted them on the other side, to stretch out their right hands, symbolical of defiance to the Devil. Then the Bishop asked,—

"Dost thou renounce the Devil and all his works, powers, and service?"

"I do renounce them," answered each candidate.

"Dost thou renounce the world, and all its pomps and pleasures?"

"I do renounce them."

They were then asked whether they believed in each article of the formula which we call the Apostles' creed, down to "the holy Catholic Church:" and to each question they answered, "I do believe." The concluding queries were:—

"Dost thou believe in one baptism of repentance for the remission of sins?—and dost thou believe in the life of ages?"

The sponsors stood close behind the candidates.

The Bishop now breathed on the faces of the candidates, and offered a prayer that God would be pleased to deliver them from the power of Satan, and to put His good Spirit within them. Each of the persons to be baptized was now anointed on the head, to signify that they were grafted into Christ, the good olive-tree. At this juncture in later times, the sign of the cross was marked on their foreheads: but it is very doubtful

Camilla, however, gathering from Victor's relpy that he at any rate did not consider it wrong to paint the baby, resumed her brush with an easy conscience.—*Page* 123.

whether it dates back to the first century, before the cross was an acknowledged Christian emblem.

The women were then conducted by Priscilla and Alexandra, the deaconesses, to a baptistery by themselves, where they undressed for the ceremony. Here they were presently joined by the Bishop, who took the hand of each candidate, the deaconesses standing close round her, and immersed her in the water three times, saying—

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, I baptize thee."

The Bishop then left them, and the newly-baptized women were assisted to dress by the deaconesses, after which they returned to the vestibule of the church. A second anointing followed, and the baptized persons were clothed in white robes, the Bishop saying to them—

"Receive the white and stainless garment, and bring it forth without spot before the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ, that thou mayest receive life of ages."

"Amen," was the response.

This closed the ceremony.

For a week Camilla was required to wear her white robe, taking the utmost care to preserve it from defilement of every kind: she then resigned it to Priscilla, and it was laid up, marked with her name, in the sacristy of the church. A few weeks afterwards she was confirmed, the Bishop laying his hands upon her head with solemn prayer that she might grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, and be enabled to perform those vows and that profession which she had taken upon herself in the presence of the Church. She was now ranked among the Faithful, and was admitted to the Lord's Supper.

It had not yet occurred to the minds of Christians that the Church could mean anything but the congregation of the Faithful. When a man speaks, as many now do, of the clergy as if they were the Church, and of the Church as if she were Christ, he is not approaching, but departing from, the ideal of the primitive Church. For the bride to talk of herself rather than the bridegroom, is a very bad augury of the state of her heart.

As Sophronia and Camilla returned one evening from the Sacrament, Penelope—detained at home on account of the baby—ran to meet them in the outer peristyle.

"O Lady! almost immediately after your departure, came a messenger bearing this scroll, which he said was for the Lady Camilla. I would have run after you, but I thought you were too far away."

"Better not," answered Camilla, taking the scroll. It was a small piece of parchment, rolled round, and tied with a blue thread secured by wax.

"A letter, Camilla!" exclaimed Sophronia. "Is it from Domina Marcia?"

"It must be; no one else would write to me," replied Camilla, cutting the string. "It is from Marcia, and I will read it to you," she added, having run her eye over it.

"To the gracious lady of patrician birth, Lælia Camilla Parata, her sister, Marcia Gratiana, spouse of Lucius Strophius Cornelius, wisheth health and all felicity.

"Know, dear sister, that I am in good health, as also is Strophius my lord. And I desire much to hear the same concerning thyself. Know also that we had a prosperous journey hither, and arrived at Rome in health and safety. Moreover, in this city I have found several persons who escaped the eruption at Pompeii, namely, Domina Cornelia Vipsania, and Dominus Arrius Pamphilius; I hear also of others from our city, but I cannot yet learn their names. I have, however, no hope that our father or our mother can be found amongst them. My lord's house is very large, and I have had the pleasure of being present at many entertainments. The Temple of Juno is one of the most splendid in this city, and when thou shalt visit me I will take thee to worship there. Let me hear of thy health. Salute from me and my lord Dominus Coriander, and Domina Irene, as well as Dominus Victor and Domina Sophronia. Our friends here salute thee. Farewell."

"How completely all that phase of *my* life seems past and gone!" said Camilla as she rolled up Marcia's letter.

"Yes, beloved," answered Sophronia. "'The darkness is past with thee, and the true light now shineth.'"

"I shall write to Marcia," pursued Camilla, "and tell her the whole truth as respects myself."

"Truth is always best," responded Sophronia.

The letter which was sent to Marcia ran as follows:—"To the gracious lady of patrician birth, Marcia Gratiana, spouse of the learned and illustrious Lucius Strophius Cornelius, her sister Lælia Camilla desireth health and happiness.

"Know, dear sister, that your letter has come to my hands, and I am greatly rejoiced to hear of your health and prosperity, and of your safe voyage to Rome. Know also that my own health continues good. I am glad to hear that some of our friends at Pompeii escaped from the destruction of the city, and I pray you to salute them from me when you shall see any of them.

"And now, dear sister Marcia, I have something to tell you, which I beg you to take in good part. I have been received by holy baptism into the religion of the Christians. Victor and Sophronia are also of this faith. I would that you likewise might be induced to hear the Christian preaching at Rome, and to believe in our pure and holy faith. Trouble not yourself concerning me: there is no present persecution of this faith; and should there be hereafter, I trust that God will strengthen me to hold the truth even unto death, should such be His will.

"You desire me to salute from you Dominus Coriander and Domina Irene. Know that we now see nothing of them. Dominus Coriander was greatly annoyed on the discovery of our religion, and has insisted on our holding no communication with his wife.

"Dominus Victor and Sophronia salute you and your lord. Salute from me all friends, and forget not Flora. And may Christ the Lord have mercy upon you, though you know Him not! Farewell."

A quiet, uneventful year passed away before Camilla received any answer to this letter. When that period had elapsed, as Camilla was crossing the peristyle from her own rooms to those of Sophronia, Penelope came up the steps with two small rolls in her hands.

"Letters!" cried Camilla. A letter was an event in those days. "Surely, Penelope, they are not both for me?"

"The messenger said, for the Lady Camilla."

"From my sister, of course," responded Camilla, as she took the rolls, her voice betraying her unusual excitement: "but from whom can the second be? I trust Marcia is not ill, and that some one else has written to tell me."

She was hurriedly cutting the strings of her letters as she spoke. Both were addressed alike—"To the Lady Lælia Camilla Parata, dwelling in the house of the illustrious Lord Marcellus Victor, in the renowned city of Corinth." But before Camilla had finished reading the first paragraph of the letter which was not in her sister's writing, a cry of amazement and delight burst from her lips.

"My mother! my mother!" she cried; and sinking on her knees, she buried her face in her robe and sobbed like a child.

"O Camilla! have you heard that Domina Aurelia has survived the ruin of Pompeii?"

Camilla held out her scrolls to Sophronia.

"Read them both—my mother's first."

And Sophronia read.

"To Lælia Camilla her daughter, Flavia Aurelia Cotta desireth health, felicity, and wisdom.

"I doubt not it will be with pleasure that my child will learn the news of my safety. Only yesterday did I myself discover what had befallen my daughters. I am now in Marcia's house, and I bid thee to set out for Rome at the earliest possible opportunity. Thou shalt learn the details of my escape when I behold thee. Thy father is in eternal sleep.

"Camilla, my daughter, I have no words to tell thee the grief and horror with which I have read thy letter to thy sister. Better, far better hadst thou died in Pompeii, than that thou shouldst be saved to forsake the gods, to disgrace thy family, to break thy mother's heart. I charge thee to give up at once this infamous superstition to which thou hast devoted thyself. By all thy mother's tenderness—by all thy filial love—by the Lares and Penates of thine own house—by the home of thine early years—by the grave of thy father under the ashes of Pompeii,—by all that thou countest and has counted precious, holy, or dear—I charge thee to resign at once the false gods

which thou hast adopted, and the evil friends who have caused thee to disgrace thyself, and come home to thy mother's embrace, to thy sister's house, to thy country's gods! Come to me, my best-loved, my youngest-born, my heart's Camilla!

"The gods keep thee! Farewell."

Marcia's letter was shorter and sharper.

"Marcia Gratiana to her sister Lælia Camilla sendeth greeting.

"I always knew you were romantic, but I never before thought you a fool. Camilla, I am ashamed of you! Come to Rome at once, and let us save you from the disgrace into which you have plunged yourself. Would that Sophronia had been directly sent back to Calphurnius! I can see that it is your silly infatuation for that creature which has led you into your present shameful position, and I perceive more than ever the evil of associating with those beneath me. Let us not feel that we have to blush for your folly, but come immediately, and you shall be forgiven. I wish you health and happiness, and a better mind—more common sense, in short. Farewell."

Camilla continued to weep all the time that Sophronia was reading. The reproaches of Marcia, however, seemed to make little impression on her. She was too much accustomed to the bitter tongue of her sister, whenever any difference of opinion arose between them; but Sophronia readily perceived that the mournful pleading of the widowed Aurelia had reached the heart of her child. She trembled for Camilla, yet she did not speak.

At length Camilla lifted her head, and her sobs grew calmer.

"O Sophronia, what can I do? My mother's letter has almost broken my heart! God Himself has told us to 'honour our father and our mother': and yet 'he that loveth father or mother more than Christ, is not worthy of Him!' What shall I do? Counsel me, dear."

"Thou has counselled thyself, my sister. Art thou willing to be unworthy of Him?"

"O no! no!"

"Then thy course is plain."

"But how far would it be right for me to disregard her command to go to her?"

"She has told thee her object in that command—to lead

thee away from the fold—away from the Shepherd. Therefore in going to her thou wouldst be departing from Him. At least so it seems to me."

Camilla sat on the floor gazing into vacancy. In a few minutes she sprang up.

"Give me parchment, and let me write at once, before I waver in my decision. Let me write and send it before I break my heart! Mother! Mother! if I only might have dared to see you!"

Sophronia found the parchment, and Camilla wrote—"To the noble patrician Lady, the Domina Flavia Aurelia Cotta, her loving and humble daughter, Lælia Camilla, wisheth health, mercy, and all blessing.

"First give me leave to say, mine own dear Mother, how very, very happy it made me to hear of thy health and safety, for which I have scarcely dared to hope. Also that I wish exceedingly to see thee, and am deeply grieved that I may not do so. But, sweet Mother, thou hast charged me to resign the faith as the concomitant of my coming. How can I give up Christ? How shall I deny Him who gave His life for me? I have been washed with the hallowed water, devoted to Him in holy baptism: I have heard the sound of His gracious and blessed words: I have felt upon my head the symbolical unction, and have been blessed by the imposition of the hands of the Bishop; I have celebrated with bread and wine the commemorative feast of the body and blood of the Lord; I am sealed to Him for ever; I *cannot* go back!

"Dear, dear Mother, pardon me, I pray thee! I will give up at thy command anything save Christ! If thou knewest how full mine heart is of love to thee, and of sorrow that I cannot obey thee without disobeying the Lord who hath loved me and died for me, thou wouldst forgive me. Salute from me my sister; her words are answered herein also. Sophronia salutes you both. I would with all mine heart that I could have done otherwise without sin. Farewell."

CHAPTER XIII.

THROUGH THE STORM.

'And some have found the world is vain,
Yet from the world they break not free,
And some have friends that give them pain,
Yet have not sought a friend in Thee."

PROSPERITY was now visiting Victor, and he found himself able to return to Coriander a portion of the sum lent to him. Inquiring at his house in the city, he learned that he had just moved there for the winter: and he was ushered into a peristyle, the decorations of which were quite as magnificent as those of the suburban villa. Coriander entered in a few minutes.

"Ah, Victor, my son!" said he, in tones of indubitable pleasure. "It is an age since I have seen thee. How fare you all?"

Victor replied that they were all well, and that his family had been increased by the birth of a daughter: he was also thankful to add that he was prospering in business.

"May the gods be thanked!" said Coriander. "But, Victor, my friend, why do you shun us so pertinaciously? You have not been near the house for months."

"I must remind you of what you said, Coriander."

"Nonsense! A man never means exactly what he says when he is angry. Beside, I never did say that *I* did not wish to see you, nor that you were not to salute Irene, if you met her. I have no objection to any one seeing her in my presence. I only want to prevent your making a Christian of her. She will be

delighted to hear of the birth of her little niece: women always go mad over babies, I believe. *She* won't proselytise for a while yet, if you like to let Irene see her: and we shall not harm her, I suppose, even in your precise eyes."

"I will trust you with our little Aglaia," said Victor, smiling. "And as to our persuading Irene to become a Christian, I fear there is little cause for you to alarm yourself on that score."

"Well, no, I hope not," said Coriander, clapping his hands. "Eubulus, tell your mistress I wish to see her here.—Now, Victor, don't take my angry words too literally. I love thee, my son, as well as ever, despite thy strange whims and fantasies."

Before Victor had uttered more than two or three words in reply, the curtain was held back, and Irene entered. Victor, who had not seen her since the day of his marriage, was startled by her appearance. She looked so changed, so thin and white, and she came in so languidly, that his first words were the natural expression of a fear that she was ill. Irene replied, in a tone of unusual quietness, that she was very well; but her old vivacity seemed gone. Even the news of her baby niece only roused her to slight animation, though she asked if she might not see the child.

"Certainly," said Victor, "as Coriander has kindly permitted it. Euphrosyne shall bring her to-morrow."

Very uneasy thoughts troubled Victor on his way home, concerning the wisdom, and even the lawfulness, of his promise to Coriander.

On communicating his difficulty to Sophronia, she answered that she had doubted from the first the lawfulness of the promise, but she thought that he ought to know best, and she dared not dictate to her husband, nor interfere between himself and his conscience. Still more perplexed, Victor consulted Stephanas, who heard his story patiently, and then said, "Thou hast done wrong, my son, in my judgment. Thy wife is right. Ask thy Pagan friend to give thee back thy promise."

So instead of sending Euphrosyne with Aglaia, Victor and Sophronia themselves walked to Coriander's house, the latter carrying the infant. Victor was ushered into one peristyle, Sophronia into the other. The former was immediately joined

by Coriander, but the latter waited long for the arrival of Irene.

"Coriander," said Victor, "I think I have done wrong, and I wish to tell you so. I have promised what I cannot perform, —say rather, what I ought not to perform. Will you relieve me from the obligation of that promise?"

"To what promise do you allude, Victor?" asked Coriander in evident surprise at the tone of his friend's remarks.

"To the promise which I made you not to speak to Irene.—Let me tell you first of all, that Sophronia herself has brought the child, and if you wish to prevent conversation between her and her sister, we had better adjourn at once to the other peristyle."

"The baby will be the subject of the first half-hour's conversation," said Coriander, smiling rather cynically. "No need for that."

"But will you release me from that promise?"

"Do you mean that you wish to proselytise Irene?"

"I mean that I want to be left free to speak as circumstances may determine, if I am to be allowed to see her at all."

Coriander reflected for a moment, his face growing graver as he did so.

"I am sorry. In that case, I can only prevent all communication."

"Be it so," said Victor. "The sin will not then be on my conscience."

"Sin!" muttered Coriander, contemptuously.

"Friend, if you knew that an African lion, fierce and powerful, lay inside a deep cavern, at whose mouth a party of youths and maidens were dancing without thought of danger, would you warn them of their peril, or not?"

"I suppose I should."

"And can you blame me because I wish to save my sister and my dearest friend from the peril of soul in which I believe them to be?"

"By no means," returned Coriander, not unkindly. "I do not blame you for acting on your convictions—every honest man must do that. I only wonder how you can entertain con-

victions of so absurd a nature: and as your theories are not mine, I do not wish my wife to imbibe them."

"Do you know what my convictions are?"

"I know that your sect is everywhere held in disrepute, and that you worship a crucified malefactor."

"Do you know on what evidence we act?"

"No!" said Coriander, with a short, scornful laugh. "Nor do I care."

"Yet you shrink not from pronouncing 'absurd' a belief of which you know no more than this?"

"Your position—in a despised minority—shows it to be so. The most are naturally the wisest. Why can you not be content with a religion which satisfies the mass of mankind?"

"If truth reside in the majority, then when the majority changes, the facts must change with it. Are you ready to commit yourself to that?"

"Facts! Religion is not facts, but opinions."

"The religion which has not facts as its basis is a poor unsatisfying thing, and will never stand the strain of adversity or death."

"You know no more than others! We are all children groping in the dark: the wisest of us only know enough to cry for somebody to bring a lamp."

"Pardon me. The wisest of you, possibly. For us the lamp has been brought, by Him who is the Light of the World."

"Exactly!—that is just what I dislike. Why should you fancy yourselves so much better than other people?"

"We never do. To think lowly of one's self is one of the chief precepts of our religion."

"What a mean-spirited set you must be! Yet you never cease assuring us that your religion is the best in the world."

"You do us injustice, Coriander. It is the only one in the world. All others are to us mere irreligion. But I have yet to learn that magnifying one's God is the same as magnifying oneself."

"There you go, on your waxen wings! We never parade our religion, and worry you to join us."

"Indeed! My knowledge of history must be at fault. I

thought Nero Cæsar had impaled, drowned, beheaded, hung, burnt, and thrown to wild beasts, a tolerable number of our faith."

"Well, well! I never burnt, hung, drowned, impaled, nor beheaded you!"

"You have been the kindest of my friends, and I can never forget it. But can you not see, that believing what I believe, this is only an additional motive to my anxiety to rescue you from destruction?"

"What do you believe?" said Coriander, more thoughtfully than was his wont. "Come now, let me hear it."

Victor was silent for a moment, engaged in ejaculatory prayer. Then he said,—"I will tell you. We believe that there is one God, and none other, all-powerful, omnipresent, omniscient, perfect, eternal."

"A conception worthy of Socrates! Go on."

"This God was the Creator of earth and heaven, and all that therein is, including man. He made the first man perfect and pure, after His own righteous and holy image. But being left open to temptation, this man fell. He disobeyed the one command of His Creator. Ever since then, we, the children of this man, have been born imperfect and impure,—liable to the wrath of God upon all sinful and disobedient. But He, of his infinitely rich grace and unutterable mercy, sent into the world His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to take upon Him the nature of man, and to suffer in our stead. The Father gave the Son,—the Son gave Himself for this work. By the infinite merit of his Godhead, he bore away all the penalty due to those sinners of whom, by His manhood, He made Himself the representative. He that believeth in Him hath no condemnation. But he that believeth not, must be content to bear the penalty of his sin himself; and that penalty is the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched."

"You have more to say for yourselves, I must allow, than I thought you had," said Coriander, still thoughtfully. "Still yours appears to me a very inconsistent and incomprehensible religion."

"It must necessarily do so to all unbelievers."

"Truly, I think so. Two Gods, and yet only One! Infinite mercy, and a fire that is not quenched! The innocent punished, and the guilty pardoned without merit!—How do you reconcile all this, Marcellus Victor?"

"I do not reconcile it. God has revealed it, and the reconciling of it I leave to Him. It is above my finite comprehension.

"You believe, then, what you confess you do not understand?"

"Do not you? How is a fire lighted?"

"By a tinder-box, I suppose."

"And *how* is it that steel and flint, being struck together, produce fire?"

"Oh, because—well—I really don't know. How should I?"

"Yet you believe the existence of fire?"

"My senses give me evidence of it. Now, that is exactly my objection to all systems of religion apart from philosophy. You who prate about gods, whether you call your divinity Zeus or Christ, believe something of which your senses give you no evidence."

"Well, it is not of much use to dispute the question. Where is Sophronia?"

"Oh, she is with Irene—let us go to them."

"How do you know she is with Irene?"

"Why, you told me yourself," said Coriander, stopping and looking astonished.

"How does that convince you?"

"Oh, that is a question of fact. Don't try to come round a man in that way Of course I believe a fact when I am told it by a man of truth and honour."

"And my truth and honour are apparent to your senses?"

Amusement and annoyance struggled for the mastery in Coriander's countenance. Before his reply was ready, Irene came in, preceding Sophronia, and carrying Aglaia. She was more animated, but not less pale, than on the previous day. The conversation now became general. But on Victor's departure he said in a low tone to his friend,—"Then, remember, I am released from my promise."

"So be it, if it distress you. I must take other measures."

"O Victor!" cried Sophronia when they had left the house, "how wretchedly ill Irene looks! Didst thou not think so?"

"I thought so more yesterday," was Victor's answer.

"My unhappy sister!" sighed Sophronia. "She would not hear a word from me of the past, nor of the faith."

The sum which Victor offered to return to Coriander was declined in such a manner that he could not repeat the attempt.

It was not until Aglaia could run and prattle, and had been joined by a sister whose name was Berenice, that Camilla received any further communications from her mother or Marcia. Letters came at last—Marcia's keenly bitter; Aurelia's sternly mournful. She told Camilla that she would make one more effort—she did not explain what—to rescue her from the degradation to which she had voluntarily lowered herself; if this failed, she would thenceforth have but one daughter, and Camilla must be content to know that she was regarded by mother and sister as one dead.

Meanwhile, Camilla found that she was slowly, but surely, mounting the ladder of professional fame. She had already sold several paintings, the Achilles first, for which a very handsome sum was paid. It was not until after a long interval that she discovered that the unknown patron who had laid the foundation of her fortune by this first purchase was Coriander himself, at the solicitation of Irene.

It was towards the close of autumn. Victor had been on business to the other end of the city, and feeling loth to go home on so beautiful an evening, he had strolled down to the seashore, where he stood watching the play of the waves. The repetition of his own name startled him from his reverie, and looking up he saw that Irene stood apparently alone beside him. Two slaves, whom Victor did not see, were at a little distance behind.

"Irene!" he cried. "I never thought of seeing you here."

"I often come down here," she said in a dreamy tone, as if the spirit of the slow soft tide breaking upon the shingle had passed into her. "Some of my happiest hours have been passed on the shore."

"Are your hours generally very happy ones, Irene?"

"Not as you consider it, perhaps."

"I know of no happiness apart from Christ. If you do, I should like to hear of it."

"Do you talk to everybody in that way?"

"I am afraid not. I suppose I ought to do. But I am not so interested in everybody as in you."

"I suppose you would like to see me a Christian?"

"I should, Irene, from my very soul!"

"You never will," she said, listlessly twisting a long strip of seaweed into fantastic forms.

"I am afraid not," said Victor, very sadly.

Irene dropped the seaweed, and turned her full face towards Victor.

"Marcellus Victor!" she said in a tone deeper and graver than was her wont, "what do you mean by tempting me in this way? Do you not know that if I were to become what you wish me, my husband would turn me out of doors, and all my acquaintances would cry shame upon me?"

"And one thing more, dear Irene, which you have omitted. 'There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.' God would rejoice; and Christ would rejoice; and the holy angels would rejoice; and all the Church would rejoice: for the life to come is more than this life; and the death to come is more than this death!"

"I have made my choice," she said, looking away again to the sea.

"When man or woman chooses evil in this life," said Victor, "we say, 'Unhappy soul!' How much more should it be said for her who hath chosen evil for the life which is to come, through the ages of the ages?"

Irene rose from her seat on a fragment of rock.

"All do not think as you do," she said.

"It matters not what men think, but what will be," was the sorrowful reply.

"Victor, cease tormenting me!" cried Irene with a burst of passion. "I tell you, I have chosen my path, and I will pursue it. Let me alone! Farewell!"

"Not lost yet," was Sophronia's comment when Victor nar-

rated the interview. "I believe the Lord will yet bring her back—that He is striving with her even now. The new birth of the Spirit is no painless thing."

The autumn passed away, and the winter came: but no more was heard of Irene.

On a very dark and stormy winter evening, Sophronia and Camilla were sitting in one of the small chambers surrounding the peristyle. Aglaia and Berenice had been laid to sleep in the adjoining room, and they heard Victor's step as he crossed the outer peristyle, and came up the steps.

"Is it not very wet?" asked Sophronia.

"Extremely wet, and the wind is violent beyond any night that I remember since we came to Corinth. I told Euphrosyne to bring a brazier of charcoal."

Euphrosyne brought the brazier, and after it the supper, and family prayer followed. Camilla retired to her own rooms, and Sophronia was on the point of doing the same, when a low wailing cry reached them from the street.

"Somebody is in trouble," said Sophronia.

"What was it that cried?" answered Victor.

"Does it matter what it is?" responded she. "It was at the side door—I entreat thee to see what it is, for the wind blows so fiercely that Euphrosyne will scarcely be able to stand against it."

"I am sure she will not," said Victor; "I will go."

It was not easy to draw back the bolt, and when at last he succeeded in doing so, the wind swept keenly up the passage and across the peristyle. Victor opened the door wide, and looked out into the night. And there—drenched to the skin through the thin covering which enfolded her, the rain beating pitilessly upon her unsheltered head,—with dishevelled hair, on foot, alone, and evidently in some dire distress—lay the beautiful Irene.

CHAPTER XIV.

IRENE.

"Man, what is this, and why art thou despairing?
God shall forgive thee all but thy despair."

—FREDERIC W. H. MYERS.

WHATEVER were the nature of the calamity which had befallen Irene, it was plain that it had for the moment stunned the faculties both of body and mind. Victor carried her into the peristyle, and laid her down on one of the mattresses spread in its recesses, which answered the purpose of the eastern divan and of the western sofa. The only sign of life which she gave was to bury her head in the folds of her wet robes.

"Irene!" cried Sophronia. "My child, you are dripping wet!"

Irene did not move.

"'Let her alone, for her soul is vexed within her,'" said Victor in a low tone.

"It will kill her!" answered Sophronia under her breath: but she obeyed her husband's bidding, only saying in a soft voice—"God comfort thee, my sister!"

Irene did not rise, nor lift her head. Only one word came quivering in a long-drawn sob from the white lips—"God!"

They waited, and she lay still, some minutes longer. At last she roused herself suddenly, and lifting up a white, haggard face, where horror and fear seemed to dilate the large dark eyes, she spoke passionately, hurriedly, as if she wanted to get her story told before her strength should fail.

"Sófia, I am ruined, body and soul! Coriander died yesterday morning. His niece, Zoë, and her husband, took possession last night of all belonging to him, and to-night they have turned

me out of the house without so much as a change of clothing. Had he not freed me by a legal process, they would have sold me along with my own slaves! They refuse to recognise any claim of mine on his estate; and they are rich and can employ lawyers, and I cannot. I come to you for shelter, since neither in earth nor heaven is there any other shelter for me. My other friends are like Zoë—they flattered me while I was rich, and now that I am poor they will not look upon me. I have been spurned from the doors of women who last week would have kissed my robe. Man will have none of me, since I can give nothing back; and God will have none of me, for I have denied Him. But for the sake of our common blood, which I never denied, and for His sake whom you serve, and who was crucified for you, grant me a chamber in the house which my husband gave you, for the few days before I die, and spare me a morsel of bread such as men cast to their slaves!"

Irene's head sank down again as her voice ceased.

"Beloved," said Sophronia's sweet tones, "praise be to the Lord who hath brought thee home! Thou shalt dwell with us, and share all that we have; and say not that God will have none of thee, when He hath prepared for thee a shelter among hearts that love thee. Rise, my sister, and let me lead thee to the rest thou needest sorely."

Irene made no reply, but she permitted Sophronia to lift her from the ground, and to lead her into a bedchamber where in a few minutes a bed was made ready, and she lay down in physical comfort at least, with a kiss and a blessing from the sister who was as ready to take Irene to her heart in the midnight of her adversity, as she had ever been in the noonday of her wealth and splendour. Sophronia then went to seek her husband, whom she found in the outer peristyle.

"Have I said well, Victor, and not contrary to thy will?"

"When did I ever hear my Sophronia speak otherwise than rightly? But, dearest, it cannot be for long."

"I do not think it will be long," replied Sophronia sadly.

"It matters little whether it be long or short, if the Shepherd will bring home the lost sheep: and I think the lost sheep is coming home."

When they saw her again on the following morning, they could scarcely recognise the Irene who had received them on their first coming to Corinth. The beauty, the vivacity, the airy grace, which had once distinguished her, were gone. But gone with them were the apathy, the scornful pride, the stubborn unbelief. Physically, she was very ill; morally, she was gentle, humble, docile as a little child. There was no more unwillingness to hear the truth—no more oppositions of science falsely so called. The meek depression of manner was as little like the brilliant beauty whom they recalled in her superb saloons, as were the thin, pallid, pain-worn features. Only on one point she still, though quietly enough, refused to listen, and put away from her the comfort which Sophronia strove to pour into her wounded soul. She still maintained that God could have no mercy for her. That God was, and that He was the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, she now conceded in an instant. But no words could move Irene from her conviction, that those who had not sought Him, who had denied His being, and stifled their own convictions for so long, had no claim to His mercy. By degrees they learned that Coriander's last illness had been very short; that Zoë and her husband had been staying in the house at the time; that Adrastus, Zoë's husband, being himself learned in the law, and an unscrupulous man, had informed Irene, who was too ignorant to be aware whether he spoke the truth or not, that she, having once been a slave, had no claim whatever upon any part of her husband's property, which belonged to Zoë as his heir-at-law: and that Irene might think herself well off that she was permitted to go in peace with her own liberty and the clothes which she wore. To add to her misery and degradation, Zoë and Adrastus pretended to dispute the validity of her marriage, though Irene added, with a momentary flash of her old animation, that they had witnessed the ceremony themselves, and had always paid her marked respect during the life of Coriander. Victor took up the question in a rather more pugnacious style than his wife approved, though with her usual reticence Sophronia forbore to tell him so. He entered with great interest into the particulars of Irene's story: declared that he was certain that Adrastus had imposed upon

her, and that she *had* a claim on her husband's estate: and he would have gone to a lawyer at once about it, had not Irene herself prevented him.

"No, dear brother," she said, "I thank you equally for your intended kindness. But take me not back from this rest to the storm; and take me not back from the dust before God's foot-stool to the whirlwind of the world. What are wealth and rank now to me? My life is ebbing away from me; let me die in peace of mind with respect to things earthly, if I may not in peace of the spirit with respect to things heavenly."

Victor looked at the white wearied face before him, and said no more. He felt that she had spoken the truth as concerned her own life. He held a consultation with Sophronia; and the following day he held a second with Stephanas. His object was to persuade the Elder to come and converse with Irene.

It was a difficult task which lay before Victor and Sophronia, though not so difficult as it would have been at a rather later period in the history of the Church. When "cross of wood and bishop of gold" had given place to "cross of gold and bishop of wood," and the erewhile simple elders of the Church had become lords over God's heritage, the "lapsed" were treated with a severity which in many cases amounted to cruelty, and was utterly unworthy to represent Him who stretcheth forth His hands all the day, with "Yet return again to Me, saith the Lord." But in the earliest ages this state of things had scarcely arisen, though even then it was needful for an Apostle to remind the Corinthian Church that the punishment was sufficient, and that they ought not to leave the repentant brother to be "swallowed up of overmuch sorrow." Happily for Irene, the presiding Bishop at this time was a man of particularly tender heart. While he shook his head as sternly as was in him on hearing of a case of apostacy, yet he softened visibly when he found that the recalcitrant sinner was not only deeply penitent, but a dying girl: and after a little show of hard-heartedness, he consented to come and see her, since she was not able to plead, as she ought to have done, kneeling at the closed door of the baptistery. When he came the next day, the sight of Irene's face seemed to dry up the last drop of indignation in his heart.

"Who art thou, my daughter?" he said, when he had seated himself beside her couch.

"I am the worst of sinners," said Irene in a low voice. "I have sinned against light and knowledge; I have stifled my convictions, and have denied my God."

"Dost thou desire salvation?"

"With all my heart I do."

"Art thou able to do any good works to the saving of thy soul?"

"Not one."

"Canst thou satisfy God's justice for thy sins?"

"No, verily."

"Then it seems to me," said Stephanas quietly, "that Christ will have to save thee, for there appears to be no other way."

"It is too late!" was the sorrowful response.

"Dost thou believe in Christ, the Saviour of the world?"

"Assuredly I do."

"But thou art not among the saved! How is that?"

"I have sinned too deeply."

"Then He cannot save great sinners, only little ones? My daughter, put not this dishonour on the Lord. If His blood cannot avail for thee, where is its efficacy? If His merits are not sufficient for thee, where is His righteousness? If His mercy cannot extend to thee, where is His omnipotence?"

"You mistake me, Elder. I said, not that I doubted the power of the Lord."

"Then what dost thou doubt?"

"Whether He *will* save me."

"That, then, is doubt not of His power, but of His love! Child, if I were under the terrible necessity of disbelieving in some part of my Lord's perfection, I had rather doubt His might than His compassion! Look at me. I have not seen thee, nor known thee for one hour. Yet to save thy soul, and to give thee peace, I would yield the few months of life that I may yet have to live. Canst thou, darest thou say that the Lord is less merciful than man?"

"Elder, I have not scorned, and derided, and denied *thee!* I have not received from thee countless benefits, and yet said afterwards, when thou wert looking to me for friendship, 'I know not

this man!' I have not wronged and ill-used thy servants because they were thine. I have done this, and far more, to Him."

"So did Peter the Apostle, and Paul."

"Not like me."

"No, for they were worse than thou art, so far as I can learn. But tell me, when did Christ say unto thee from Heaven that thou wert not of those for whom He died? I will believe it after that, but not before. It is the contrite heart the Lord loveth. It is him that cometh whom He hath promised not to cast out. It is to the weary and heavy-laden that He offers rest."

"'Weary and heavy-laden!'" sighed Irene. "I am that!"

"If thou art that, my daughter, go to Him and claim His promise. He made it for thee. He holdeth it out to thee. He is waiting for thee. Wilt thou keep Him waiting?" Irene made no answer, but great tears crept from her closed eyes. Stephanas thought that enough had been said for the moment. He rose, blessed Sophronia and Camilla, and took his leave.

Day after day succeeded, and Irene grew weaker and weaker. Sophronia was indefatigable in her ministrations both to the diseased body and the yet more diseased mind. She read to her out of the Gospel of St. Matthew and the Epistles to the Corinthians, of which she had procured a copy by a Christian scribe, the originals being laid up in the church. But for a time everything seemed to do more harm than good. Irene took up just the condemnatory portion of every passage. When Sophronia read the Beatitudes to her she said,

"Stop, dear Sophronia: it all condemns me."

"How so, my sister?"

"Because I am not meek; I am not pure in heart; I am not merciful; nay, instead of being persecuted for righteousness' sake, I have myself persecuted the righteous."

"But thou art poor in spirit, as thy words at this moment show; thou art a mourner for sin; thou art hungered and athirst after righteousness."

"I am not righteous."

"There is none righteous: Christ is our righteousness."

Irene turned on her couch with a sorrowful shake of the head, as if it might all be true for her sister, but not for her.

The next morning Stephanas inquired how Irene was.

"Just the same," answered Sophronia, mournfully. "Elder, what shall I do? How can I win her to trust in Christ?"

"'Wait on the Lord,'" he responded. "Thou canst not win her; that is the work of the Paraclete. Wait for the Lord, and pray always."

"Have I not waited?" she rejoined, with the tears which did not rise lightly in the eyes of Sophronia. "Have I not prayed —yea, through all the years since we were parted at Aleppo?"

"Then 'wait on the Lord,'" repeated Stephanas earnestly. "His ways are not our ways, but He never disappoints a soul that waiteth on Him."

"There is no time to wait!" she said with a sob.

"Daughter of earth," was the answer, "art thou afraid the Father of the Everlasting Age will be too late? 'He that believeth shall not make haste.' 'They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me.' 'Fear not; only believe.'"

That evening Penelope was returning from the market (let it be remembered that the early Christians attended Divine service nearly every day) when, a few doors from Victor's house, she perceived two women, one evidently a stranger, and more handsomely dressed than the other. The latter, recognised by Penelope as a woman whom she had frequently seen at the market, was just saying, "Indeed, I know not, but I will ask this damsel," in a low tone as if to herself. On Penelope's approach she came forward and said, "Damsel, here is a lady, a stranger in this city, who cannot speak our language, and she desires to learn where to find the house of Marcellus Victor."

"Ask her to follow me," said Penelope. "I am the slave of the Lady Camilla, who dwelleth with the mistress of the house."

The woman communicated this information in a foreign language to the lady, who, calling for some one from a distance, turned and accompanied Penelope. A third woman, dressed like a slave, appeared from a side-street, and followed her mistress at a respectful distance. Penelope would have asked the stranger's name, but having no means of making the foreigner understand her, she could only indicate the way in silence. She went round to the side door, which led to a chamber communicating with the women's peristyle.

"I pray you, gracious Lady," said Penelope, addressing Sophronia, "to speak to this stranger in her own tongue; for she—"

The explanation went no further. The work dropped from Sophronia's hand as she rose, and from her lips in astonished accents broke the exclamation—"Domina Aurelia!"

"Sophronia," said Aurelia in her old manner—a mixture of dignified self-possession and condescension—"I come to see my daughter. You are so changed I should scarcely have known you," she deigned to add.

Sophronia's manner had lost much of its old constraint, especially since her marriage; but the voice and words of Aurelia seemed to freeze her back into the old submissive reticent being whom she had once been. For a moment her mien was no longer that of Victor's wife and the mistress of his house, but that of the slave-girl of Aurelia Cotta at Pompeii.

"I am much changed, Domina," she said, in the low plaintive tone which Aurelia knew well. "Suffer me to inform Domina Camilla."

She crossed the peristyle to Camilla's rooms, leaving Aurelia and Irene to cast furtive glances at each other, and each to wonder who the other could be. As Irene knew no Latin, and Aurelia no Greek, conversation was out of the question. Irene could only point to a seat with a momentary revival of her old graceful ease, and Aurelia took it with a motion of thanks, querying in her own mind who this ladylike girl could be who seemed so ill. It also passed through her mind that snail-broth would be the very thing for her: but at this point of her reflections the door was thrown hurriedly open, and with a cry of "Mother! dearest Mother!" Camilla rushed into her arms.

For the first five minutes all Aurelia's anger was forgotten. Every fond name was lavished on her youngest-born, in her delight at seeing her again: while the close clasp of Camilla's arms round her mother's neck spoke her feelings more eloquently than words. At length Aurelia's mind reverted to the past.

"Now, Camilla, I am come to take you to Rome."

Camilla raised her head from Aurelia's breast, and said with a shudder, "No, Mother! Oh no! no!"

"Foolish child!" said Aurelia. "I tell you I am come to take you back to Rome; and take you back to Rome I will, if

She went round to the side door, which led to a chamber communicating with the women's peristyle.— *Page* 147.

I wait here a year for it. I do not wish to force your inclinations unkindly, but you must prepare yourself and reconcile your mind to going with me. Now no more about it at present. I am quite as self-willed as you are."

"But, Mother——"

"No, I am not going to allow any conversation on that subject. I have laid my commands on you, but I am willing to give you a little time to reconcile yourself to them.—Strophius and Marcia salute you, and are both very anxious to see you. Now tell me who is this lady on the mattress."

"The Lady Irene, one of the chief ladies of Corinth during the life of her husband. She is Sophronia's sister."

During the first three-quarters of Camilla's explanation, the mercury in the thermometer of Aurelia's good opinion rose very rapidly. But the last few words sent it down again to zero.

"Her sister!" said Aurelia, again putting on her patronising air; "ah, poor thing! she looks very ill."

"She is very ill. Irene, dear," added Camilla in Greek, "this is my mother."

"I am glad to hear it," said Irene from her couch, quite unconscious of the low point at which she stood in the estimation of Aurelia. "I wish I were well enough, and rich enough, to make her welcome as I should have done of old in my own house."

Camilla translated Irene's remark, to which Aurelia replied, "You had better thank her from me. One has to be civil to such people sometimes."

"Mother!" said Camilla in amazement, "you cannot have understood me! Has Marcia never spoken to you of Dominus Coriander and Domina Irene? Irene was as great a lady in Corinth as ever you yourself were in Pompeii!"

"Marcia certainly has spoken to me of Domina Irene, but I understood that she was very rich and beautiful: and she never told me that she was the sister of my slave. If she be, she must be a Jewess, I suppose, and I know of nothing lower than that. I suppose, then, Sophronia is a great lady here, and is called Domina when she is spoken to?" asked Aurelia contemptuously. "Is there a perpetual Saturnalia in this country, and do the slaves take the highest positions?"

Camilla began to realise. as she had never done before, that she was now living in a different atmosphere from that of her early life, and that Aurelia had remained behind in the old climate. Her own estimate of her friends was so high that she had not calculated on her mother's being so low. Jews had become very different in her eyes since she had learned to regard a Jew as her God and Saviour: and among the earliest Christians, while respect was always paid to rank and office, mere wealth went for nothing, and the poorest brother in the faith was considered far more honourable than the richest or most accomplished heathen. Camilla felt half angry with Aurelia for her inability to see in a moment that which it had taken her some years to acquire; and there was more of Pagan pride than Christian meekness in her next words.

"Of course she is addressed as the Lady Sophronia, and has as much right to the title as I have myself. Her parents were well-born and wealthy, and her husband owns this house."

"I suppose you believe all they tell you," said Aurelia with a contemptuous smile. "Perhaps you expect me to thank my *Lady* Sophronia for all the condescending kindness which she has deigned to show my daughter?"

"I hope you will, Mother," said Camilla resolutely.

Aurelia laughed. "I beg you to understand, Domina Camilla, that the society of slaves has not improved your manners. It is time I took you away, if you are to remain a gentlewoman."

The entrance of Victor saved Camilla from a reply. He at once came forward to Aurelia, and addressed her in Latin, taking his own position as master of the house, and welcoming her to it. When Sophronia returned to the peristyle she devoutly hoped that Aurelia would consent to behave towards her with as much respect as she had shown to her husband. She miscalculated the nature of the Roman lady, who was by no means ready to admit that her quondam slave could possibly be elevated to an equality with herself. She styled her, indeed, "Lady Sophronia," but it was with so maliciously scornful an emphasis that poor Sophronia blushed painfully, and requested that she might be addressed as of old.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LOST FOUND.

"Yea, through life, death, through sorrow and through sinning,
He shall suffice me, for He hath sufficed:
Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning;
Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ."

—FREDERICK W. H. MYERS.

THE next morning Camilla prepared as usual to attend Divine service with Sophronia. Aurelia inquired where she was going, and learning that it was to the Christian church, peremptorily bade her daughter remain at home. After a moment's hesitation, Camilla obeyed, brought her work into the peristyle, and sat down by Irene's couch. For a time they were all silent. At length Irene said in a faint voice,—

"Is the Lady Aurelia a Pagan?"

"Yes," answered Camilla.

"Tell her from me that I have been what she is, and that now I would willingly blot it out in my own blood. Let her hear from one as near the gates of death as she must be one day, that I am sure there is no safety nor true happiness outside of Christ, though He hath not made me a partaker thereof."

Camilla rendered Irene's words into Latin.

"Do you give her white snail broth?" was Aurelia's answer.

A little annoyed at the slight put on the impressive words of the dying girl, Camilla returned a short negative.

"Then send to the market for some white snails at once!" said Aurelia energetically: "at least, if there be any in this country where everything seems to be turned upside down."

The sound of Irene's voice made Camilla bend down again to her.

"Say to the Lady Aurelia that I have tried, as did Solomon the King, the power of all else to satisfy. Rank will not do it; wealth will not do it; beauty will not do it. Friends and genius can only do it momentarily — they do not satisfy. I know Christ *can* do it—where He pleases. I am not worthy to pray for any, who can scarcely pray for myself; but you can pray for her that she may be brought home to the fold, and by a less dreary and terrible way than I am treading."

Again Camilla translated the words of Irene.

"Why does she keep talking to me?" said Aurelia, "Is she so wedded to her superstitions? I want to hear nothing of them."

"You do not know anything of our faith, my mother," said Camilla.

"I know as much as I have any wish to know!" said Aurelia rather sharply. "Don't talk to me about it."

And Camilla did not talk.

Sophronia and Victor brought Stephanas home with them. Aurelia immediately asked who he was, and appeared to look on him with a mixture of contempt and curiosity. "So that is one of the Christian priests!" she said. "He is a benevolent-looking old man. What a pity that he should be a prey to this low fanaticism!"

Stephanas sat down by the couch of Irene.

"Well, my daughter!" said he. "Still as dark as ever?"

"Still as dark, Elder," replied Irene sadly. "And the night is very near. The valley must be traversed, and there is none to bear the lamp."

"After night cometh day."

"There is a night which has no day, but ends in the outer darkness."

"And there is also a promise that 'at evening-tide it shall be light.'"

"The evening-tide is come; and there is not light."

"Child!" said the Elder, laying his hand upon her head, "for thou art but a child in years in respect of me, who like

the Apostle am Stephanas the Aged—listen to my voice this once, for I bring thee a message from the Lord. 'As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth: why will ye die?'"

"I would live, if I might," faintly responded Irene.

"What hinders? shall God the Justifier? shall Christ who died? shall the Holy Ghost that sanctifieth? 'All things are ready'—they are waiting for thee. What is it that is not ready?"

"I cannot tell," said Irene, lifting her languid eyes to the face of the old man. "I am ready."

"Nay, child, thou art not ready! Art thou not waiting till thou canst bring something in exchange for the great salvation? Dost thou not think thyself too sinful for Christ to save?"

"I know I am."

"Then thou wouldst fain have some goodness of thine own to bring? Thou thinkest that hadst thou not sinned so deeply, He would have saved thee?"

"I hope He might."

"Behold how by unbelief thou limitest the power and love of the Lord! Behold how by thine own righteousness thou art held back and kept away from Him!"

"My righteousness!" said Irene very thoughtfully. "Nay, Elder! How can a woman sinful as I am have any righteousness of her own?"

"My child!" said Stephanas tenderly, "there is a righteousness which would go to Christ with its goodness, but will not go to Christ with its sin. What doth He want of thee but thine own sinful self, in thy sin, just what thou art by nature? All the goodness is on His side, and must come from Him. If thou take not thy sin to Him, who was made an offering for sin, what hast thou to take?"

"O Elder! is that it?" said Irene, her face lighting up as with a sunbeam. "May I take myself and my sin to Christ, however great it be?"

"*Mayest?* Thou must. What else hast thou to offer?"

"Nothing—nothing!" said Irene earnestly.

"Then how canst thou ever go to Him at all, except with all thy sin? And He shall cast it all into the depths of the

sea. God can never find the sins which Christ hath thus borne away."

And Irene only said, "Amen!"

In the evening of that day she was restored to the communion of the Church of Christ.

Three nights later came that other change, which all around her had expected for so long. So softly, so peacefully she sank to sleep, that the exact moment of her departure was not known to any of the watchers.

Aurelia stood with Sophronia and Camilla by the coffin of Irene.

"Unhappy girl!" she said in a compassionate tone. "She must have suffered a great deal before she reached this last deprivation of all. It may be that even the eternal sleep is preferable to intense suffering. And it is possible too—some philosophers think so, I believe—that you were right in trying to confirm her faith in whatever religion she professed. It matters little, of course, in what religion one dies; and to be comforted in sinking into the last sleep is no doubt desirable. It can make no difference afterwards."

"Our sister shall rise again," responded Camilla. "Mother, dear, death is no endless sleep, but the beginning of another life, which is one of eternal bliss to those who know the Lord, and who shall abide with Him for ever."

"You believe that?" said Aurelia scornfully.

"I do believe it, and have confessed it before the Church."

"When will you be ready to go with me to Rome?"

"Never—if you mean by that, to cease being a Christian."

Aurelia took Camilla's hand, and led her across the peristyle to her own rooms.

"Now, Camilla, we must come to an understanding on this subject, and better early than late. You have had time to make up your mind. Are you ready to return?"

"No."

"Are you content to be regarded by me and your sister as dead?"

"Better so than that I should be found missing among the disciples of Christ at the Great Day."

"Camilla, I entreat you to come!"

"Mother, if it were only a question of residence in one place or another, much as I am attached to my friends here, I would not have said a word, but would have obeyed you without a murmur. You are my mother. But from your own words it is evident that your object in commanding my return is to win me away from the faith to the worship of the Roman idols. I dare not put myself into temptation. I have walked in the light too long to be unable to see the difference between that and darkness. I know too well the power that you have over me. I cannot go back."

"I am unable to comprehend this fanaticism which has seized you!" exclaimed Aurelia. "Before you learned anything of this superstition, you were docile and obedient. Can that be a true or good religion which prompts a child to oppose her parent? or can you imagine you are doing right in disobeying me?"

"It gives me very great pain to oppose you," began Camilla.

"Not enough to prevent your doing it!" interposed Aurelia bitterly.

"Mother, dear mother! if the contest were between your wishes and my own, or even between your wishes and what I fancied to be right, having merely my own judgment to guide me, I would not say another word. But it is between your command and the command of God. Every morning and evening I pray in the words of Christ, 'Lead us not into temptation.' How can I offer that prayer if I deliberately expose myself to the temptation?"

"Camilla, do you know that I have treated you in a very different way from that of most mothers? Do you know that nine out of ten women would have simply laid on you their commands to return, and refused to listen to any explanation or opposition? I have been very gentle and lenient with you. What are you that you should set yourself up above Marcia, above even me, and tell us, as if you were the wisest of philosophers that we are wrong, and that *you* are right? You would

not have dared to do so three years ago. Then, indeed, you were a good and obedient daughter: but now, it seems as though the Camilla who was my child had truly perished at Pompeii, and some new and malignant being had assumed her form. How dare you defy me in this manner?"

The tears were fast filling Camilla's eyes. Her mother's last speech distressed her intensely, for it reflected not only on herself, but on her religion. Was it indeed true that in becoming a Christian she had become disobedient and unloving?—and if so, could she be right in her decision? Had not Christ Himself said that those Pharisees who allowed a man to refrain from helping his parents in their poverty on the plea that his wealth was sacred to God, were setting at nought God's commandments, that they might keep their own tradition? Where did the point come, where was the line drawn, within which to obey her mother was to obey God, and without which to yield to Aurelia's persuasions was to apostatise from Christ? Camilla wavered. Might it not be her higher duty to go to Rome, and to live the life of faith there? Assuredly it was the harder one. Then other words came flashing on her memory like lightning. "I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother." "If a man come to Me, and hate not his father and mother . . . yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." When could such a precept be put in practice if not now? How could she have any certainty that if she went to Rome, she would be allowed to attend Christian rites? Could she rely on the protection of God, after placing herself voluntarily in the position of the outcast and backslider?

The battle raged wildly in Camilla's soul. Aurelia saw the struggle, and like a wise woman was silent. She knew that this gave her the best chance.

At last Camilla turned to her.

"Mother! it is with you, not me, that the decision rests. If I go with you to Rome, I go as a Christian—a confessed Christian, and your whole world must know that I am a Christian. If it is not to be so, I remain here. Choose for me."

"Camilla! you cannot be so mad! Do you suppose that I

shall deliberately proclaim to all my acquaintances that my youngest daughter is no better than a lunatic?"

"I do not ask you to proclaim anything. I will make the proclamation myself. I only beg you to understand that if I go to Rome, I must and shall make it."

"That is your last word?"

"Yes, Mother, my last word."

"Then if you have made up your mind to be such a miserable fool as that, you had better stay where you are. I do not wish to be branded with disgrace, and probably brought before the tribunals, because my daughter chooses to set up her crude and youthful fancies in opposition to the mature judgment of the mother whom she ought to find at once her virtue and her pleasure in obeying."

"Mother, dear Mother, it is not my fancies which I seek to follow! I must obey the Lord."

"Very well. That shows what your new religion is worth. It is a system of proud, puffed-up stubbornness, and not of virtue."

"Mother! you——"

"That will do," said Aurelia, coldly. "Lælia Camilla, my youngest daughter, whom I loved best of all my kin, died in the eruption at Pompeii. What does it matter to me that there chances to be a maiden among the votaries of a mean sect of low fanatics at Corinth, who calls herself by my daughter's name? Henceforth, Domina, we are strangers. I shall return to Rome. I thank the immortals I have yet one daughter!"

And Aurelia walked out of the room, leaving Camilla to weep for a few minutes as though her heart were broken.

On the following day Aurelia quitted the house. She took a cold leave of Sophronia and Victor, but scarcely deigned to utter a word of farewell to Camilla, who bent down with many tears to kiss her robe. They supposed that she returned to Rome, but years elapsed before they heard of her again.

It was long before the even and peaceful tenor of their lives was any further disturbed. A little boy was added to the family, to whom Victor laughingly declared that he should be

very happy to resign half of his peristyle. His business continued to prosper, and Sophronia found means to buy additional slaves, whom she much needed. The idea that there could be anything objectionable in slavery had not yet dawned on these early Christians, though their slaves had a far happier lot than those of the Pagans. Camilla went on painting, sometimes able to sell her pictures at a high price, sometimes finding it for a time impossible to dispose of them. They were called in turn to mourn the deaths of Stephanas and Priscilla, the position of the latter being conferred upon Rhoda. Aglaia and Berenice grew of an age to assist their mother, and sometimes Camilla, in whose profession Aglaia showed much interest, and she was delighted to be summoned to the studio to assist in the grinding and mixing of colours—a work which a classical artist did for himself. And if the youthful Marcellus did sometimes surreptitiously creep into that chamber when empty, and exercise his budding artistic tendencies by bestowing on the scarcely-finished "Parting of Hector and Andromache" a dab of red lead on the point of Andromache's nose,—or embroider a blue garment with a yellow pattern, not of superior execution, —or improve the tone of the purple carefully prepared on the palette by a liberal addition of oxide of chromium,—it was perhaps no more than was to be expected from a gentleman whose extremely lively propensities caused equal astonishment and anxiety to his quiet mother.

Twenty years had elapsed since the death of Irene and the departure of Aurelia. Along the street in which stood the little Christian church, two women were slowly walking. One of them, who was middle-aged, wore a falling hood upon her head; while the other, who walked with difficulty, was clad in the white robe of baptism.

"Are you happy, my child?" said the latter. "'My mother' I might almost call you."

"I was never so happy in my life before, dearest Mother. I feel as if life had been incomplete until to-day. For twenty years I have prayed most earnestly that you might be

brought home to the fold of Christ; and He hath granted me that which I requested."

"I owe you an infinite debt, my daughter; for I should never have cared to know anything about Christ at first, but from my curiosity to know the doctrines which had so strange an effect on you, for which purpose I went to hear secretly the preaching of Ignatius; and I should never have come here but for your sister's death, and the second marriage of Strophius, which made his house no longer home to me: and by that time I knew enough of the faith to see that you were not the disobedient daughter I had thought you, but the faithful servant of the Crucified which I, too, had begun to wish that I might be. Alas! that I should be so unworthy of Him, and so little able to show forth His glory!"

"Nevertheless, dearest Mother, those called at the eleventh hour in the parable of the Lord received as much as they who had borne the burden and heat of the day."

"I know it. And all the more praise be to His holy name, who has magnified His grace in calling such as I am, even at that eleventh hour."

"Amen!" said the younger woman. "Peace be with thee, Deaconess Rhoda."

"Grace be upon thee, Deaconess Camilla! I was hurrying on so quickly that I saw thee not, my sister. Our beloved sister Sophronia is well, and her husband and children?"

"All well, my sister, praise be to God. But my mother and I now live apart."

"Surely I have heard it, but I forgot. I must not stay, for I promised my daughter Glaucia to be back as soon as possible to tend her sick child. Farewell, my sisters! The Lord be with you!"

And with a reciprocal farewell, Rhoda hurried on, while Aurelia and Camilla came more slowly towards their new home, next door to the house of Marcellus Victor.

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